

“Was ist Gott?” The Representation of the Divine in Friedrich Hölderlin

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates the tension between religious and philosophical ways of representing the divine in the romantic-age German poet Friedrich Hölderlin and his contemporaries. While religion—especially the Judeo-Christian tradition—represents the divine as being partly or wholly “beyond” this world, philosophy tends to situate the divine within a “worldly” or immanent system, such as the Hegelian system of *Geist*. While Hölderlin’s poetry has a reflective form closely related to Hegelian dialectic, it also tends to represent the divine as transcendent and therefore outside the competence of dialectic. Furthermore, Hölderlin repeatedly represents divine experience in terms of the spontaneous “event,” which points back to the biblical model of revelation rather than to a philosophical notion of God as a universal substance (Spinoza and Hegel) or an “idea of reason” (Kant). In reading Hölderlin this way, I suggest that poetry is a form of discourse in which other historical discourses—in this case: theology and philosophy—can encounter one another without being reduced to the one or the other. His openness to this irreducible tension is, I suggest, what distinguishes Hölderlin from intellectual contemporaries such as Fichte, Schleiermacher, and Hegel, and is partly what facilitates the lively critical interest in him today.

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Chapter 1

God in Conflict: Situating a Religious Reading of Hölderlin

My intent in this study is to provide a religious reading of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin, and my reader should be duly puzzled. What is a “religious” reading? Certainly it is something modern, since it implies the meaningful possibility of a *non*-religious reading. In the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century, no one would have bothered with a “religious” reading, because there was no generally accepted “non-religious” alternative.¹ This being the case, a religious reading carries with it the history of its possibility, and this history should, ideally, be part of the reading itself. Such will be the case here, since I will be reading the “religious” in Hölderlin as that which 1) is associated with the name or concept of God, and 2) finds no counterpart in the secular

¹ The seeds of the “non-religious” option emerged from the late middle ages. Hans Blumenberg and John Milbank point, in this regard, to the nominalist response of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham to the neo-Aristotelian realism of the Scholastics in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Charles Taylor points to the emergence of a desire for universal human betterment, which began in the medieval church, but which had turned against religion by the 18th century. The new valorization of philosophical reason (Milbank) and scientific “self-assertion” (Blumenberg) that came out of nominalism, and the medieval “Reform” movement (Taylor) did not at first constitute a “non-religious cause,” since they were conceived *within* a theological framework. Perhaps not until the 17th century, with figures like Grotius and Hobbes trying to move beyond political theology, do we have a *self-consciously* non-religious alternative open up. Even then, not until the popularization of “reason” and the crisis of biblical authority in the Enlightenment can we begin to speak of a generally available, self-consciously non-religious way of looking at the world. See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1983); John Milbank, *Theology & Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007); Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God* (New York: Knopf, 2007); Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale, 1974).

appropriation (or what was perceived as secular appropriation²) of religious structures and ideas undertaken by Hölderlin's intellectual contemporaries. I will, in other words, be reading Hölderlin directly against the secularization process that created what Taylor calls the "exclusive humanism" we encounter today. The key religious concept will be transcendence, both because it is presupposed by all other theological concepts and because it is the concept most irreconcilable with exclusive humanism. Transcendence is the "space" into which God withdraws, but it is also the site of divine agency, the place from which God can reveal, "touch," and love humanity without being reduced to humanity. The main point of contrast throughout my religious reading will be Hegel, who effectively eliminates transcendence by collapsing human and divine spirit into one immanent spirit, but I will also reference the immanent religions of Kant, Fichte, Schleiermacher, and others.

I am not turning the poet into a preacher, nor am I suggesting that Hölderlin is "doing" theology. On the contrary, I am saying that theology remains with Hölderlin despite himself. Hölderlin is, as Rainer Nägele reminds us, a "poetic thinker," which means that he tries to capture truth through the "constellation and sequence, [and] above all the caesuras" of various representational modes ("Poetic Revolution," 516). We can "connect the dots" of this constellation in various ways. Some see the silent anguish of

² Hans Blumenberg has persuasively argued against the idea that Christianity has any "original ownership" over the ideas purportedly secularized in the modern age. Providence, for instance, was originally a Stoic idea, and its importation into Christianity marked, ironically, a secularization (*Verweltlichung*) of the new faith as it tried to deal with the delay of the end of the world. Furthermore, the belief in progress (which is supposed to be the secularized form of the belief in Providence) really has its roots in the reaction against theological absolutism in medieval Scholasticism. The point is this: what looks like a "secularized" form of an "original" Christianity probably isn't; rather, this is how we explain it to ourselves. Since this study only focuses on romantic and idealist writers, I only need to worry about the *attitude* of secularization which *does* obtain in this period, even if, for instance, Hegel's view of history has nothing to do with primitive Christian eschatology.

nihilism in Hölderlin's poetry, while some see the infinite reverberation of self-deferring signification.³ Others see the unity-in-diversity of speculative idealism, while yet others see, as I do, the strange and benevolent power of a divine agency.⁴ Again, I am not claiming that Hölderlin is an orthodox Lutheran or Pietist, but I do see him employing, perhaps unconsciously, the structure and dynamic of transcendence in his poetry.

Wolfgang Binder sees in Hölderlin "ein Fall theologischer Denkformen im Dienst eines fremdes Begründungszusammenhangs" (54). In other words, Hölderlin's poetry is something heterogeneous. It reflects the philosopher's desire for a dialectical grasp of totality, but also demonstrates moments of faith, humility, and gratitude for the gift beyond reckoning—attitudes without an obvious counterpart in speculative philosophy.

³ The nihilistic and the poststructural/deconstructionist views are closely related. David Constantine's intellectual biography of Hölderlin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) takes the rather nihilistic view that the poetry ultimately comes to rest in a feeling of emptiness and despair. Eric Santner's monograph, *Friedrich Hölderlin: Narrative Vigilance and the Poetic Imagination* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986), suggests that Hölderlin's poetry follows a gradual course toward an effectively nihilistic objectivism. The instability of language in the quest to "establish" God and the subject is investigated most thoroughly in Rainer Nägele's *Text, Geschichte, und Subjektivität in Hölderlins Dichtung: "Uneßbarer Schrift gleich"* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985), but has also been addressed by Paul de Man ("Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin" in *Blindness and Insight* [2nd rev. ed.; Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1983]), Andrzej Warminski ("Patmos": The Senses of Interpretation" *MLN* 91 [April 1976]: 478-500), Peter Fenves ("Measure for Measure: Hölderlin and the Place of Philosophy" in *The Solid Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin*, ed. Aris Fioretos [Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999]), Alice Kuzniar (*Delayed Endings: Nonclosure in Novalis and Hölderlin* [Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1987]), and others.

⁴ Jochen Schmidt's readings of Hölderlin tend to emphasize dialectical continuity, both in the act of aesthetic creation and in the poet's view of history. See "Hölderlin: Die idealistische Sublimation des naturhaften Genies zum poetisch-philosophischen Geist" in *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik, 1750-1945* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1988); and *Hölderlins geschichtsphilosophische Hymnen „Friedensfeier“, „Der Einzige“, „Patmos“* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1990). The prominent critic Manfred Frank departs from the "*communis opinio*" by sharply distinguishing "zwischen dem Idealismus einerseits, Hölderlin und der Frühromantik andererseits," but he still holds that the poem represents a single dialectical unity, albeit one that cannot be thought ("Hölderlin über den Mythos," *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 27 [1990-1991], p. 149). His reading is thus only a partial departure from philosophical exegesis, and he makes no room for a religious reading. As something of a lone voice, Wolfgang Binder discusses the theological dimension of Hölderlin's poetry in "Hölderlin: Theologie und Kunstwerk" (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 69 [1972]: 350-378), which I will discuss further on. A more historical and more recent appreciation of the religious dimension in Hölderlin's work can be found in Priscilla Hayden-Roy's *A Foretaste of Heaven: Friedrich Hölderlin in the Context of Württemberg Pietism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994).

It is interesting to note that one of the earliest interpretations of Hölderlin's poetry is religious. Whether it is self-consciously religious is hard to say, but it suggests that in Hölderlin's environment even the elite were bound to *theologischer Denkformen*. I am referring to Brentano's response to the opening stanza of Hölderlin's celebrated poem, "Brod und Wein":

- 1 Rings um ruhet die Stadt; still wird die erleuchtete Gasse,
 Und, mit Fackeln geschmückt, rauschen die Wagen hinweg.
 Satt gehn heim von Freuden des Tags zu ruhen die Menschen,
 Und Gewinn und Verlust wäget ein sinniges Haupt
 5 Wohlfrieden zu Haus; leer steht von Trauben und Blumen,
 Und von Werken der Hand ruht der geschäftige Markt.
 Aber das Saitenspiel tönt fern aus Gärten; vielleicht, daß
 Dort ein Liebendes spielt oder ein einsamer Mann
 Ferner Freunde gedenkt und der Jugendzeit; und die Brunnen
 10 Immerquillend und frisch rauschen an duftendem Beet.
 Still in dämmriger Luft ertönen geläutete Glocken,
 Und der Stunden gedenk ruft ein Wächter die Zahl.
 Jetzt auch kommt ein Wehn und regt die Gipfel des Hains auf,
 Sieh! und das Schattenbild unserer Erde, der Mond,
 15 Kommet geheim nun auch; die Schwärmerische, die Nacht, kommt,
 Voll mit Sternen und wohl wenig bekümmert um uns,
 Glänzt die Erstaunende dort, die Fremdlingin unter den Menschen,
 Über Gebirgshöhn traurig und prächtig herauf.
 (StA 2,1: 90)⁵

The stanza was published in Senckendorf's *Musenalmanach* in 1807, and in a letter to Luise Hensel in 1816, Brentano named it "das liebste Gedicht...das ich kenne" and claimed to have read it "viel hundertmal." The first thing Brentano says in his interpretation is that the empty market in lines 1-6 symbolizes "das weltliche Treiben ins

⁵ "StA" refers to the *Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe* edited by Friedrich Beißner. I will refer to this edition for all quotations from Hölderlin's poetry, with the exception of the poem "Friedensfeier," the manuscript of which was discovered too late to be included in the StA. For "Friedensfeier" and references to Hölderlin's prose, I will cite the 3 three-volume edition edited by Michael Knaupp, which will be abbreviated "MA." Knaupp's edition is based on the work of the second major Hölderlin edition, the *Frankfurter Ausgabe* edited by Dietrich Sattler.

Reale bis zur Ermüdung.” The association *weltlich-Reale-Ermüdung* already suggests

Brentano’s religious intent, which is reinforced by what follows:

Sind...die folgenden sechs [Verse] nicht die Sehnsucht der Zeit und das Gefühl der Verlorenheit, tritt im siebenten Vers nicht der Rückblick zur verlorenen Unschuld ein, und sprechen die immer quillenden Brunnen nicht von dem ewigen Quell der Verheißung, an dem die Gerechten sich laben? Mahnt diese die Glocke nicht durch die den Klang verhüllende Welt zu harren und zu beten, und ruft der Wächter nicht die Erfüllung der Zeit aus?

Phrases like “Gefühl der Verlorenheit,” “verlorenen Unschuld,” “Verheißung,” “die Gerechten,” “Erfüllung der Zeit” make the religious valence of Brentano’s reading clear, although it must be said that each of these terms could also be given a philosophical interpretation: by moving beyond prereflective unity, human consciousness also suffers a “Gefühl der Verlorenheit” marking its “loss of innocence”; the philosophical “Gerechten” also live toward an “Erfüllung der Zeit,” when our fractured consciousness will be healed, and man will no longer feel alienated from the world.

But starting with line thirteen, “Jetzt auch kommet ein Wehn,” Brentano’s interpretation takes on a Biblical dimension apparently unwarranted by the text, and it clearly parts company with any philosophical reading.

Ist der dreizehnte Vers nicht der Vorläufer des Heils, die Stimme des Predigers in der Wüste, der dem Herrn seinen Weg bereitet und seine Stege richtig macht? Und tritt mit dem vierzehnten Vers nicht der Herr auf: “Sieh’, er kommt mit den Wolken und es werden ihn sehen alle Augen.” Im sechzehnten Vers aber steht: “Und das Licht scheint in die Finsterniß, und die Finsternisse haben’s nicht begriffen.”⁶

The reason for reading the *Wehn* in line 13 as a John the Baptist figure is extremely tenuous. The interpretation of the moon in line 14 as a Christ figure is even more extraordinary. To read the line “Voll mit Sternen und wohl wenig bekümmert um uns”

⁶ *Dichter über Hölderlin*, ed. Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1969), pp. 98-100.

and hear “Und das Licht scheint in die Finsterniß, und die Finsternisse haben’s nicht begriffen” is either divinatory or irresponsible. A “real” critic would likely see the movement in this stanza from the familiar to the cosmic as a disconcerting experience. Terms like “geheim,” “wenig bekümmert,” and “Fremdlingin” suggest man’s *exclusion* from heaven. Where does Brentano find reason to speak of “Trost,” “Erbarmung” and “Erlösung”?

Brentano may be more persuaded by the poem’s rhetoric of transcendence than by its rhetoric of alienation. The poem’s focal point moves upward from the city to the sky, where it encounters heavenly bodies (*der Mond* and the personified *Nacht*) that clearly stand in for some divine agency. The second stanza (which Brentano did not see) leaves no doubt that *die Nacht* is in fact divine:

Wunderbar ist die Gunst der Hoherhabenen [i.e., die Nacht] und niemand
Weiß, von wannen und was einem geschieht von ihr.
So bewegt sie die Welt und die hoffende Seele der Menschen,
Selbst kein Weiser versteht, was sie bereitet...
(StA 2,1: 90)

Die Nacht is a power capable of bestowing favor, “moving” the world and the soul, and “preparing” the future. Because this divine power is “strange” (*die Fremdlingin*) and associated with the extraterrestrial (*Sterne, Mond*), we naturally suspect it is transcendent. The upward shift in the poem’s focus culminating in the vision of transcendence justifies his attempt at a religious interpretation.

But the poem also puts up resistance to such an interpretation, as we have already seen. The “strangeness” of the Night may suggest transcendence, but it is experienced as indifference (“wohl wenig bekümmert um uns”), which is hardly compatible with the Christian divinity invoked by Brentano. Of course, if God’s ways really are higher than

man's ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), it may be that mortals perceive indifference where there is really something else. This is a fair theological point, but it does not really justify the happy confidence of Brentano's Christian reading. The stanza ends on a mixed note—the phrase “traurig und prächtig” applies to the moon, but it really describes the failed sublimity experienced by the poet. The divine has lifted him up only to confuse and disappoint him.

This does not mean that Brentano is wrong to think that the hint of transcendence in the opening stanza subtly points toward a Christian hope. It is quite possible that he is *also* right, and that Hölderlin's work is cross-pressured by theological and philosophical tendencies. If this is the case, the poem's integrity lies not in connection to an ideal, but to the poet's own historical reality. The poem accurately registers the ideological conflict of an age of mounting secularization. In other words, the poet harbors an instinctual faith in Christian transcendence at the same time that he is experiencing the death of God through philosophy.

How could a German poet writing before Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud contemplate the starry face of heaven *without* bringing us to the threshold of religion? In 1800, the “cosmic imaginary,” as Charles Taylor calls it, still rests by and large on a theological, or at least theistic, base, even if changes in science and social practice were beginning to put the secular and the sacred into radical competition. Even an extreme critic of religion like Voltaire was not able to fully shake off the need for God, as can be seen clearly in various passages of his *Philosophical Dictionary*. True, the seeds of the secular reinterpretation of religion had already been sown. Descartes, Spinoza, Newton, Reimarus, Lessing, Kant, Herder and others had done their part, intentionally or not, to

recreate religion on new foundation that did not require transcendence and revelation. It is a short step, intellectually and historically, from this reduced version of religion to a committed disbelief, such as we find in Feuerbach and Marx. The danger, however, comes when we imagine this transition from belief to unbelief too cleanly. Flaubert and Nietzsche were conscious atheists, but they also knew that in historical and instinctual ways they were still religious.

I confess that Christianity has always been seductive. When you see only its gentle side, it wins your heart... I'm not surprised that a generous heart like L. Blanc should have dreamed of seeing it purified and restored to its ideal. I too had that illusion...⁷

[*Der letzte Papst*.:] "o Zarathustra, du bist frömmere als du glaubst, mit einem solchen Unglauben! Irgendein Gott in dir bekehrte dich zu deiner Gottlosigkeit. Ist es nicht deine Frömmigkeit selber, die dich nicht mehr an einen Gott glauben läßt?..."

In deiner Nähe, ob du schon der Gottloseste sein willst, wittere ich einen heimlichen Weih- und Wohlgeruch von langen Segnungen...

Laß mich dein Gast sein, o Zarathustra, für eine einzige Nacht! Nirgends auf Erden wird es mir jetzt wohler als bei dir!"

„Amen! So soll es sein!“ sprach Zarathustra mit großer Verwunderung...⁸

In the 21st century, exclusive humanism is firmly established as a theoretically, socially, and psychologically tenable position. It would be a hermeneutic folly, however, to think that something similar held in 1800, even among the elite. At that time, orthodox belief was *beginning* to fall into discredit among the general population of elites, and the religious habits of thought and feeling engendered by over a millennium of Christian influence were scarcely diminished. Indeed, the romantic theologian Friedrich

Schleiermacher redefines the word "religion" to mean nothing but these internal instincts

⁷ *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, vol. 2, ed. Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1982), p. 117.

⁸ *Werke*, vol. 6.1, eds. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), p. 321. Karl Löwith quotes some of these lines in his discussion of the Christian heritage in Nietzsche. See second appendix in *Meaning in History* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1949), p. 222.

previously associated with the external forms of religion: “[Religion] half mir als ich anfang den väterlichen Glauben zu sichten und das Herz zu reinigen von dem Schutte der Vorwelt, sie blieb mir, als Gott und Unsterblichkeit dem zweifelnden Auge verschwanden (195). The inner form of religion remains when the external form begins to crumble, and this inner form is not timeless and a priori. Schleiermacher’s “religious intuition,” for instance, is unthinkable without the historical backdrop of Christian mysticism. Hegel’s view of history is unthinkable without the Christian historiographical tradition that began with Joachim of Fiore. Also, the “double-spirit” structure of idealism (absolute *Ich*/my *Ich*, Spirit/my spirit) would have probably been unthinkable without the Christian doctrine of the Holy Ghost—a superior, universal, eternal spirit that “dwells” in our weak, individual, mortal spirits.

This study takes seriously the persistence of religious *Denkformen* and emotional habits in the face of secularization. I assume a certain degree of unevenness between the pace of religious and philosophical (and for that matter: economic and political) development to be an anthropological fact,⁹ which means that within the right historical window a person can be, in some combination, both a humanist *and* a believer. At the very least, historical individuals sometimes have to discipline their feelings and instincts in order to keep them in conformity with their reasoned ideas (or vice versa), because the historical climate they inhabit is not itself disciplined and consistent. Hölderlin, in my view, can be read in this way, and I will treat Hölderlin’s poetry as *symptomatic* of the tension between religious and philosophical tendencies around the year 1800.

⁹ Marx had something like this in mind when he said that change in the ideological superstructure is often a few steps behind change in the economic base.

The principle difference between my reading and a “secularization” reading of someone like M.H. Abrams is that I focus on tension rather than harmony. For Abrams, the “romantics” are those writers who “undertook, whatever their religious creed or lack of creed, to save traditional concepts, schemes, and values which had been based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation, but to reformulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature” (13). The emphasis here is on smooth transformation of religious content into philosophical content. Abrams is obviously right, to a large extent, about the romantic age “saving” and “reformulating” religious concepts, and his study is a necessary one. The problem with Abrams’s study comes in its unspoken assumption that religion is cancelled out (*aufgehoben*) by its “reformulation” in philosophical terms. But is this right? Is there any room left among the elite for non-reformulated religion alongside the reformulated kind?¹⁰

Here Hans Blumenberg’s thesis about the separate genealogies of theology and rational “self-assertion” becomes useful. Blumenberg argues that the rise of scientific or “self-assertive” reason (which certainly includes Kantian and idealist philosophy) is not substantially identical to the decline of religion. In the romantic period, theology does not “turn into” the philosophy of Spirit as the “classic” secularization theorists like Karl

¹⁰ In his recent book, Colin Jager makes an argument similar to mine in many respects, but in reference to “design” theology within British Romanticism. He also remarks on the limitations of Abrams’ view of romantic secularization, and suggests that romantic secularization should be understood “not as a loss of belief [in the “unsecularized” religious original] but rather as an example of the differentiation that characterizes modernity” (1). *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007).

Löwith seem to suggest.¹¹ If this were the case, then it would make little sense to speak, as I am doing, of a *tension* between religious and philosophical ways of thinking.

In the classic secularization account (to which Blumenberg's is a response), philosophies of consciousness like Hegel's are reconstructions of religion rather than competitors to it, and this means that consciousness can only entertain one view or the other, not both. The reconstruction is the evolution of the original. A diachronic tension in the form of nostalgia is entirely possible, but not a double-mindedness, a simultaneity of religion and rationalism, in which part of me believes and part of me doesn't. In the classic account of secularization, we perceive our "reformulated" religion to be, for better or worse, the only contemporary religious possibility. We can reject this reformulation and deliberately (and perhaps with bad faith) go back to a primitive Christian faith, but this does not mean that primitive faith has been a "living" alternative all along. Löwith seems to mildly recommend a return to pre-secularized Christian faith, but this comes only after he has discredited "reformulated" religion as an artificial construct that can no longer lay claim to our belief. In other words, he returns to faith only after the competition has ceased to compete. Löwith's offers a *single*-stranded narrative of faith and reason. At no point is there really room for double-mindedness, where faith and reason sit side by side in history without one being "reformulated" into the other.

In Blumenberg's account, by contrast, religion falls on hard times in the modern period,¹² and "self-assertive" or scientific reason *reoccupies* the field of ideas and

¹¹ See Löwith's *Meaning in History* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1949) for the classic articulation of the secularization thesis against which Blumenberg is reacting.

¹² Blumenberg does not investigate the reasons for the waning power of the church, even though this is a necessary part of the historical mechanism of reoccupation that he proposes. Undoubtedly the same "reason" that tries to reoccupy the field of religion is partly responsible for theology's decline, but the scientific narratives that replace theology are not same ones that may have weakened religion in the first

concerns laid out by religion. This is a subtle but profound distinction. Historically, scientific reason arises to serve purposes entirely different from those of theology,¹³ and it is *unnatural* for it to take on religious questions, as it does in the 18th and 19th centuries, about the meaning of history, the nature of “spirit,” and so forth. It responds to “residual needs” left by the decline of religion, but it is not adapted to fill those needs. Blumenberg argues that history—in this case a millennium and a half of Christian history—creates intellectual “positions” that need to be filled, and a foundational shift (like that from theological reason to scientific, self-assertive reason) does not automatically erase the old positions, at least not quickly. A 19th-century scientific atheist like Marx is still filling the position of eschatological expectation within his doctrine of an impending proletarian revolution and communist paradise.

Important for our purposes is an *implication* of Blumenberg’s argument rather than the argument itself. If scientific reason reoccupies religious positions, then it does not negate religion. Instead of evolving into reason, religion is sidelined, and continues to operate in an independent albeit diminished capacity. Faith and reason therefore *can* be entertained simultaneously, since there is no historical or dialectical logic that forbids it.¹⁴

place. Charles Taylor’s theory of secularization compliments Blumenberg’s by showing that much of the weakening of religion came about through changes in the social order, and not through direct intellectual challenges at all. See footnote 14.

¹³ The modern rational/scientific tradition rises, in Blumenberg’s view, in response to the theological absolutism of medieval nominalism. The argument in brief is this: since God creates everything—including the principles of reason and the laws of nature—out of nothing, philosophy can no longer be of any use in talking about the highest, self-abiding reality. In another world, reason *could* be structured differently, and reach different conclusions. The whole point of human thought, therefore, can only be to help us get along in this world. Its goal becomes practical, or in modern terms: “scientific.”

¹⁴ This point is greatly reinforced by Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*, where he does not see modern “exclusive humanism” arising from a necessary process of Enlightenment, but rather from a less tidy process in which a transcendently grounded moral order is replaced by an immanent moral order in which mutual benefit is the principle value. This change in social thinking robs religion of one of its most

It is thus to be expected that some thinkers, such as Hölderlin, entertain an intrinsically incoherent, cross-pressured attitude about God, since the environment they inhabit is historically cross-pressured between traditional attitudes of faith and the rationalism of “reformulated” religion. With the “classic” secularization thesis, incoherent double-mindedness is more difficult to imagine.

Blumenberg’s more complex historical explanation of modern consciousness is essential to the reading of Hölderlin that I will be undertaking. I have already said that my reading is “symptomatic,” which means that there must be a “disorder” of some kind that is causing the symptom. The disturbance in question occurs in the tension between the poet’s religious *Denkformen* and the “scientific” view of the divine that he inherits from Kant, Schiller, Herder, Fichte, Schelling, among others. I see Hölderlin’s poetry as a stage on which religious ideas (such as faith, hope, *Rührung*, *Heiligung*, *Heilsgeschichte*) and their secular doubles freely intermingle, often in such a way that no one—including the stage director—can always be sure which is which. Sometimes characters will appear (*Freude*, for example, or *Dank*) for whom there is no secular double, although this may not be immediately obvious. Both troupes (i.e., religion and reason) can play on a single stage because the second does not “negate” the first; it merely shares or “reoccupies” the stage on which the first, religion, used to perform exclusively.

My work differs, then, from most other Hölderlin criticism by viewing his work as a *historical* struggle between belief and self-assertive reason rather than an *inter-rational or philosophical* struggle between reflection and truth. Philosophy does not account for Hölderlin’s general attitude toward the divine, which includes love, gratitude,

important functions, and *this*, rather than “enlightened” scientific atheism, lays the groundwork for the (accidental) incompatibility (for some) of religion and modern life.

humility, and a significant dose of faith. He has no impious, but very rational, pretension to “identity” with the divine. His contemporary Novalis is not afraid of erotic consummation with the absolute (“zehre mit Geisterglut meinen Leib, dass ich luftig mit dir inniger mich mische und dann ewig die Brautnacht währt“),¹⁵ but Hölderlin finds „der Wink genug.“ Rather than pursuing self-deification through a philosophy of identity, Hölderlin waits patiently for God relying on what can only be called a religious trust.

„Die kalte vom Herzen verlassene Vernunft“

To give a concrete sense of what the cross-pressure or double-mindedness about faith and reason looks like in Hölderlin, let us turn to a few lines from the draft of a sermon delivered to his fellow seminarians in 1790 at the age of twenty,¹⁶ and also look at a section of the letter to his mother to which he appended this sermon. These texts provide a concrete example of potentially conflicting philosophical and theological discourses working side by side in Hölderlin’s writing. We know that Hölderlin had a devout religious upbringing, which was only interrupted by his graduation from the Württemberg seminary at the age of twenty-three. His early letters and poems make his religious mindset (orthodox Lutheran flavored with pietistic notions of *Heiligung* and *Rührung*) abundantly clear.¹⁷ By the age of twenty, Hölderlin had already encountered philosophy

¹⁵ From the first of the *Hymnen an die Nacht*. See *Werke*, ed. Gerhard Schulz, 4th ed. (München: Beck, 2001), p. 42.

¹⁶ When we compare the draft from which this quote is taken with the longer, more polished sermon drafts of Hegel, we see that it is only a sketch. But as the letter to his mother quoted below suggests, it accurately represents what he must have said.

¹⁷ I pass over the poems and letters from Hölderlin’s teenage years, when his religious voice is all too clear and thus, perhaps, naive. It may be useful, nevertheless to get a glimpse of the unabashed religiosity that

and embraced its way of thought, but this does not mark a trade-off between the “immaturity” of belief and the “maturity” of reason in his life. Such a “subtractionist” view, as Charles Taylor calls it, is rarely adequate to the historical reality of secularization. The religious and the philosophical tendencies are not held apart in the sermon or the letter, but rather forced into such tight proximity, that they seem to merge, however awkwardly. We see this merging in the opening lines of the sermon:

Seit Anbeginn ehrte nichts die Menschheit so, wie die Menschwerdung Christi.
Das Wesen, welches das Leben in ihm selber hatte, dessen Dasein einzig
unabhängig war, dessen Allmacht unzähliges Leben hervorbrachte, dieses Wesen
wird Lehrer der Menschen nicht blos dadurch daß es sich als Schöpfer und
Regierer der Welt offenbart, sondern in menschlicher Gestalt unterrichtend es die
Menschen vom besten Wege zu Glückseligkeit.... (MA 2: 43)

How are we to take this confession from Hölderlin that Christ is “Schöpfer und Regierer der Welt”? Is it the sincere statement of a believer, or the ironic performance of a philosopher? Is it faith or false consciousness? A credo or a school exercise? Perhaps it

recurs in these writings. Take, for instance, the following stanzas from the 1786 poem, “Die Meinige,” in which the 16-year-old poet recalls a religious experience with his brother Carl.

Guter Carl!—in jenen schönen Tagen
Saß ich einst mit dir am Nekkarstrand.
Fröhlich sahen wir die Welle an das Ufer schlagen,
Leiteten uns Bächlein durch den Sand.
Endlich sah ich auf. Im Abendschimmer
Stand der Strom. Ein heiliges Gefühl
Bebte mir durchs Herz; und plötzlich scherzt’ich nimmer,
Plötzlich stand ich ernster auf vom Knabenspiel.

Bebend lispelt’ ich: wir wollen beten!
Schüchtern knieten wir in dem Gebüsch hin.
Einfalt, Unschuld wars, was unsre Knabenherzen redten—
Lieber Gott! die Stunde war so schön.
Wie der leise Laut dich Abba! nannte!
Wie die Knaben sich umarmten! himmelwärts
Ihre Hände strekten! wie es brandte—
Im Gelübde, oft zu betten beeder—Herz!

The Pietists call an experience like this a *Rührung*, and Hölderlin uses the phrase “gute Rührungen” in his earliest extant letter, which is addressed to his childhood pastor, the Pietist Nathanael Köstlin. For a discerning summary of Hölderlin’s relation to pietism, see Priscilla Hayden-Roy’s “Zwischen Himmel und Erde: der junge Friedrich Hölderlin und der württembergische Pietismus” in *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 35 (2006-2007), pp. 30-66. The physicality of *rühren* will be important for us in chapter three.

is best to take it the way Hölderlin told his mother to take it. In a letter dated February 1791 that accompanied the sermon draft, he speaks rather openly about his spiritual trials and discoveries. I quote at length, since I think the cross-pressure between theology and philosophy manifested in this letter is a critical justification for identifying religious

Denkformen in the later work:

Hier haben Sie meine gestern (als am Sonntage) abgelegte Predigt. Ich war dißmal ein wenig weitläufiger, als in meiner ersten. Ich führte gerne eine Materie aus, deren genaue und richtige Erkenntniß mir täglich wichtiger wird. Derjenige Theil derselben in welchem gesagt wird, *ohne Glauben an Christum finde*, wenn man die Sache genau prüfe, *gar keine Religion, keine Gewißheit von Gott und Unsterblichkeit statt*, ist es, womit ich mich seit einiger Zeit anhaltender als sonst beschäftige. Ich glaube, es gibt viele gute Christen, die nicht von jenem Saze nach seinem ganzen Umgange überzeugt sind [...] weil sie nicht in Lagen kommen, wo sie die ganze Nothwendigkeit der *christlichen* Religion von *jener* Seite kennen lernen. Erlauben Sie, liebe Mama! daß ich Ihnen sage, wie ich nach und nach dahin gebracht wurde. Ich studirte denjenigen Theil der Weltweisheit, der von den *Beweisen der Vernunft* für das Dasein Gottes und von seinen Eigenschaften, die wir aus der Natur erkennen *sollen*, handelt, mit einem Interesse dafür, dessen ich mich nicht schäme, wenn es gleich auf einige Zeit mich auf Gedanken führte, die Sie vielleicht unruhig gemacht hätten, wenn Sie sie gekannt hätten. Ich ahnete nemlich bald, daß jene *Beweise der Vernunft* fürs Dasein Gottes, und auch für Unsterblichkeit, so unvollkommen wären, daß sie von scharfen Gegnern ganz oder doch wenigstens nach ihren Haupttheilen würden umgestoßen werden können. In dieser Zeit fielen mir Schriften über und von *Spinoza*, einem großem edeln Manne aus dem vorigen Jarhundert, und doch *Gottesläugner* nach strengen Begriffen, in die Hände. Ich fand, daß man, wenn man genau prüft, mit der *Vernunft*, der *kalten* vom Herzen verlassenen Vernunft auf seine Ideen kommen muß, wenn man nemlich alles erklären will. Aber da blieb mir der Glaube meines Herzens, dem so unwidersprechlich das Verlangen nach Ewigem, nach Gott gegeben ist, übrig. Zweifeln wir aber nicht gerade an dem am meisten, was wir *wünschen*? (wie ich auch in meiner Predigt sage). Wer hilft uns aus diesen Labyrinthen? —Christus. Er zeigt durch Wunder, daß er das ist, was er von sich sagt, daß er Gott ist. Er lehrt uns Dasein der Gottheit und Liebe und Weisheit und Allmacht der Gottheit so deutlich. Und er muß wissen, daß ein Gott, und was Gott ist, denn er ist aufs innigste verbunden mit der Gottheit. Ist Gott selbst.

Das ist seit einem Jare der Gang meiner Erkenntnisse von der Gottheit.
(MA 2: 468-469)

This final phrase, “Gang meiner Erkenntnisse von der Gottheit,” captures the significance of the whole. The young seminarian is going through a process in which different epistemological authorities and methods are competing for the highest possible prize: the correct knowledge of God. What is compelling about this passage is the way it shows a public debate about religion being played out in a serious, personal way in a young student’s “confession” to his mother. The role of Spinoza in this inner struggle is stated outright, but we can also see the influence of Jacobi’s response to Spinoza (via Lessing). Jacobi’s epistemology distinguishes between things that we know based on analysis of finite givens, and things we know that could never be arrived at by the analysis of finitude. For Jacobi, such unmediated knowledge is a bridge to religion, and Hölderlin has something similar in mind when he speaks of “der Glaube meines Herzens,” which has an epistemological authority independent of reason.¹⁸ A pietistic sensibility is also at work here in Hölderlin’s association of religious knowledge with several things: warmth (implied by calling reason “kalt”), the heart (“Glaube meines Herzens”), the innate desire for eternity (“Verlangen nach Ewigem”), and the “festes kindliches Vertrauen auf Gott” referred to later in the sermon. In the sermon there is, furthermore, a clear Kantian influence in the repeated reference to the “christliche Sittenlehre” (as opposed to *der christliche Glaube*) and, possibly, in his choice to speak of the “gewisse Hofnung der Unsterblichkeit.” (It would be interesting to know whether Hölderlin developed the theme of immortality along Kantian lines in his spoken sermon. Unfortunately, the sketch

¹⁸ By the time he preached his sermon and wrote to his mother, Hölderlin had read Jacobi’s *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau: Gottl. Löwe, 1785), which, along with Kant’s critiques, was one the most important philosophical texts of the last two decades of the 18th century in Germany. Its influence was enormous, and we have a copy of the notes Hölderlin made after reading it in the summer of 1790.

doesn't go that far, although the theme of God rewarding every virtuous deed is reiterated.) Next we see the influence of the "scientific" historical theology current at the time, which tried to stem the threat of biblical text criticism by making evidence-based arguments for, as Hölderlin puts it, the "*unwiderlegbaren Tatsachen*—[die] Wunder Christi und seiner Apostel, womit diese ihre göttliche Gesandtschaft, jener seine Göttlichkeit *bewies*" (MA: 2, 44; my emphasis).¹⁹ Finally, we see the straightforward influence of Christian orthodoxy in the assignation of full divinity to Jesus, who "ist Gott selbst." Orthodoxy may also lie behind the attitude that not everything can or should be explained: "man [muß], wenn man genau prüft, mit der Vernunft...auf [Spinozas] Ideen kommen, *wenn man nemlich alles erklären will*" (my emphasis). There are certainly other ideological influences, but this is already an impressive list.

Sometimes it is hard to distinguish one discourse from the other. The opening of the sermon talks about "das Wesen, welches das Leben in ihm selber hatte, dessen Dasein einzig unabhängig war, dessen Allmacht unzähliges Leben hervorbrachte," which can be read as a fluid mix of orthodoxy, neo-Platonism, "vitalistic" Spinozism,²⁰ and proto-idealism. It is probably historically accurate to leave this ambiguity intact. This description of God becomes even more unwieldy when we add the second half of the

¹⁹ The most prominent "scientific" theologian of Hölderlin's day was the British William Paley, whose "Evidences of Christianity" (1794) sought to prove the validity of the New Testament by offering various sorts of historical evidence. Paley's principle work, *Natural Theology* (1802) defends the existence of God with arguments drawing on astronomy, natural history, and medicine.

²⁰ I am thinking of Herder's appropriation of Spinoza in *Gott: einige Gespräche* (1787), in which the divine "substance" is reinterpreted as a vital principle. Herder's theological vitalism anticipates the German idealist emphasis on the *activity* of Spirit or Self rather than its objective essence. This understanding of the absolute as activity rather than essence does not have roots in Jacobi, which is why Frederick Beiser has suggested that "the Herder text [seems] far more important than [Jacobi's text], which has lately received most attention as the source of the romantic understanding of Spinoza" (*The Romantic Imperative* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2003], p.182). He is specifically referring to Dieter Henrich's analysis of Spinoza reception in *Der Grund im Bewusstsein* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992).

sentence: “dieses Wesen wird Lehrer der Menschen nicht blos dadurch daß es sich als Schöpfer und Regierer der Welt offenbart, sondern in menschlicher Gestalt unterrichtend es die Menschen vom besten Wege zu Glückseligkeit.“ Hölderlin ignores the “personal” division of the Trinity by making Christ the *Schöpfer* and *Regierer*, which supports the platonic/Spinozan/idealist view of “God” as a simple *Alleinheit*; but then he immediately contradicts this *Alleinheit* by making it take on human form (*menschliche Gestalt*) and teach about moral happiness (“vom besten Wege zu Glückseligkeit”). There is something dizzyingly unsettled about this *Gottesbild*, not unlike the protean theology we find a few years later in the writings of Novalis.²¹

Hölderlin’s religious eclecticism or syncretism has not gone unnoticed. Ulrich Gaier sees Plato, Hemsterhuis, Ficino, Kant, Herder, Schleiermacher, Jacobi, and Pietism all present in Hölderlin’s thought about the divine. “Hölderlin faßt in einem hochkomplexen System alle diese Elemente zusammen: Das Eins und Alles, Natur und Geschichte als Räume seiner Offenbarung, die Kultur...als Reich Gottes, als Vaterland durch die wirkende Erscheinung der Gottheit und durch die entgegenstrebende Kulturleistung der Menschen” (*Hölderlin* 3-4). Gaier repeatedly suggests that Hölderlin’s “hochkomplexes System” successfully integrates all these sources, and to a significant extent this is true. Hölderlin’s early metaphysics of beauty—“das Eine in sich selber unterschiedene” (StA 3: 81)²²—offers us a way of thinking about different philosophies and theologies as so many mental expressions of a single ontological principle.

²¹ For an account of Novalis’s “precarious balance of entheism, pantheism, and irreligion” (220), see William Arctander O’Brien’s *Novalis: Sign of Revolution* (Durham: Duke, 1995), esp. pp. 216-271.

²² This Heraclitean principle is the central aesthetic-metaphysical concept of the novel *Hyperion*. See especially the “Athens” letter (StA 3: 76-90).

But Hölderlin's very eclecticism works against his pretension to system, or at least to any system that removes the problem of contingency. Gaier himself implies as much in a fairly recent essay on the poet's late "hymns." These late poems are in the hymnic style, but they don't know which god they address. Their mythical vision is heterogeneous, and they scarcely know what to plea for or what to vow (the plea and the vow being constituent parts of the ancient hymnic style Hölderlin is imitating).²³ This confusion is partly due to Hölderlin's commitment to the notion of "Begeisterung," which is a divine influx that comes erratically, as if according to God's own personal timetable. Gaier tries to interpret "Begeisterung" neo-Platonically and thereby tie it into Hölderlin's "hochkomplexes System," but this does not account for the irregularity and gift-like quality of Begeisterung. It is more like divine grace than divine emanation. Gaier overlooks this point, in my opinion. He suggests, rather, that through the combined force of science and Pietism "wurde das Bild eines persönlich waltenden Gottes geschwächt" (3), which puts Hölderlin at the "Übergang zu den Konzeptionen [des Göttlichen] des 19. Jahrhunderts, die nur noch von objektiven Prinzipien und Energien in der Geschichte reden" (4). I agree with Gaier's formulation, but only if we are clear that Hölderlin is approaching this *Übergang* from the near side. His eclecticism actually *secures* a place for the "persönlich waltenden Gottes" in his quasi-dialectical reflection in divine history.

With so many ideological sources at work in Hölderlin's thought, it seems difficult to privilege one idea as its true "spirit," especially since the composition of the system changes over time. My contention, therefore, is merely that the "persönlich

²³ Gaier, Ulrich. "'Bald sind wir Gesang'—Vom Sinn des Hymnischen nach 1800." In "Es bleibt aber eine Spur / Doch eines Wortes": Zur späten Hymnik und Tragödientheorie Friedrich Hölderlins. Eds. Christoph Jamme and Anja Lemke. München: Fink, 2004.

waltender Gott,” while it may not often be deliberately foregrounded, plays a key role in defining the tension, or sense of “problem,” that drives Hölderlin’s work as a whole.

There is a recurring notion that the divine has its own timetable, which is not conditioned by anything that happens in the human world. When it comes, the divine is an event, not merely an inner sense that could be accounted for philosophically. Combining these two notions, we may say that there is a recurring dynamic of *revelation* in Hölderlin’s representation of the divine, which prevents the “hochkomplexes System” from being a complete, self-contained system.

The divine incarnation in the person of Jesus is the perfect instance of such revelation, and Hölderlin is accordingly—and somewhat unphilosophically—attracted to it. In “Der Einzige” (probably 1802), the poet is awkwardly torn between *Schuld* for his attraction to Jesus and *Scham* for the same feeling:

Ich weiß es aber, eigene Schuld
Ists! Denn zu sehr,
O Christus! häng ich an dir,
Wiewohl Herakles Bruder
Und kühn bekenn’ ich, du
Bist Bruder auch des Eviers...

.....

Es hindert aber eine Scham
Mich dir zu vergleichen
Die weltlichen Männer.
(StA 2,1: 154-155)

As a philosopher, Hölderlin *should* see Jesus as one myth among many, but Jesus’s historical reality makes him something more: an incarnation or revelation. (Strangely, Hölderlin calls Hercules and “der Evier,” or Dionysus, “weltliche Männer,” which seems to grant them historical reality while removing their spiritual meaning—which would make them mundane, not mythical—but “weltlich” could also refer to the fact that

mythical figures are merely products of human or “worldly” imagination. In one way or another, Jesus is the empirical intersection of the human and the divine, while Hercules and Dionysus are not.) What Jesus represents cannot be mastered by any ordered system, and so the poet’s “unruly” attachment to him is justified.

If the incarnate God Jesus “troubles” Hölderlin’s poetry in certain poems, the idea of revelation causes a more general sort of “trouble” across the poet’s oeuvre as a whole. Wolfgang Binder’s essay “Theologie und Kunstwerk” sees a shifting balance between Hölderlin’s *Offenbarungspositivismus*, which “hebt den Empfänger auf,” and *Vernunftreligion*, which eliminates the role of the *Geber*. Both religious positions can be at work in a single poem, but they “gehören verschiedenen Ebenen an” and cannot be reconciled. “Sie sind durch einen Hiat getrennt, der sich der dialektischen Vermittlung widersetzt, so oft sie versucht worden ist” (52). The most important shift in the priority of these positions occurs, in Binder’s view, after Hölderlin’s work on the verse drama *Empedokles*, when the divine becomes less a speculative process of *Sichbegreifen* and more a revelatory process of *Sichzeigen*, or to use more Hölderlinian terms: *Sichfühlen* and *Erscheinen*. Binder identifies a shift “vom göttlichen Sein zu Gott...oder vom Gott, der auf den Menschen, zum Menschen, der auf den Gott angewiesen ist” (63). By shifting its weight from the speculative to the revelatory view, the poetry subtly alters the representation of divine experience in a variety of ways: paradox replaces opposition, call-and-response replaces dialectical mediation, patience replaces action, acceptance replaces willfulness.²⁴

²⁴ Binder complicates this picture by not only speaking of a shift from *Vernunftreligion* to *Offenbarungspositivismus*, but also from Pietistic theology—whose “unmittelbare, alle Verbergung durchbrechende Offenbarung” (68) is not unlike the heady *intellektuelle Anschauungen* of speculative philosophy—to Lutheran theology, with its sobering notion of a *deus absconditus*. This subsidiary thesis is

I should acknowledge my debt to Binder's essay, which along with Blumenberg's model of secularization provides the critical rationale for my own project. The relative brevity of Binder's study does not give him the room to go into the detail that will be found in this study, nor does he ask all same questions that I will be asking (e.g. about the religious use of bodily imagery and the complexities of religious temporality). However, the notion of religious *Denkformen*—specifically those of transcendence and revelation—“troubling” the dialectic of the poetry is something that we exactly share.

Hölderlin as Poet

In explaining what a “religious” reading of Hölderlin might mean, I have so far left untouched an important point: Hölderlin is a *poet*. By calling him a poet, I do not mean that he writes odes, elegies, and other objectively poetic texts. For Hölderlin and his romantic contemporaries, poetry is mode of experience and reflection, and thus more akin to philosophy than verse-making. Theoretical prose, on this view, can be “poetic” just as well—although perhaps not in the same degree—as an ode or a sonnet. The real distinguishing feature of poetic language is that its truth always exceeds itself, and it *knows* this. It is not like the language of speculative philosophy, which believes it can bear the weight of absolute knowing. Poetry always gestures to a completion beyond itself. The truth is always different from the medium of truth. “So wie die Erkenntnis die

viable, but somewhat more problematic, since recent scholarship has demonstrated the pietist influence on the young Hölderlin to be more limited than once believed, and did not exclude un-pietistic strains of Lutheran orthodoxy. Again, see Priscilla Hayden-Roy, “Zwischen Himmel und Erde: der junge Friedrich Hölderlin und der württembergische Pietismus.” The specific brand of theology Hölderlin is working with at any given moment is sometimes hard to pinpoint, which is why I begin my study (chapter two) with a very general, yet still historically specific, theological category: transcendence.

Sprache ahndet, so erinnert sich die Sprache der Erkenntnis” (MA 2: 96). Language and knowledge are always separated by the distance of intuition or memory. This point is made at greater length in another essay fragment:

Du fragst mich, wenn auch die Menschen, ihrer Natur nach, sich über die Noth erheben, und so in einer mannigfaltigern und innigeren Beziehung mit ihrer Welt sich befinden...wenn auch wirklich dieser höhere Zusammenhang ihnen ihr heiligstes sei, weil sie in ihm sich selbst und ihre Welt, und alles, was sie haben und seien, vereinigt fühlen, *warum sie sich den Zusammenhang zwischen sich und ihrer Welt gerade vorstellen, warum sie sich eine Idee oder ein Bild machen müssen, von ihrem Geschick, das sich genau betrachtet weder recht denken ließe noch auch vor den Sinnen liege?*

So fragst du mich, und ich kann dir nur so viel darauf antworten, daß der Mensch auch in so fern sich über die Noth erhebt, als er *sich seines Geschicks erinnern, als er für sein Leben dankbar seyn kann* und mag, daß er seinen durchgängigern Zusammenhang mit dem Elemente, in dem er sich regt, auch *durchgängiger empfindet...* (MA 2: 53; my emphasis)

Poetic representation—i.e., the *Idee* or *Bild* that we make of *dem höheren Zusammenhang* that we once experienced—does not take as its object something rational, “das sich...recht denken ließe.” Poetry is a figurative means of reawaking the experience of something that has passed, not in order to codify and possess the experience and thereby turn it into a philosophical “thing,” but rather to be “grateful” (*dankbar*) for it. The religious dimension of this last term emphasizes what is apparent throughout: the truth of poetry is greater than the poetry itself, and the attitude of poetic language is completely different from the attitude of scientific language.

Poetry is thus a stance toward language, rather than a particular textual tradition or rhetorical style. What we usually think of as poetry—metered, lineated text that employs sounds and figures in evocative and suggestive ways—is not necessarily poetic at all, even though it is extremely well adapted to serve poetic ends. Poetry itself is a gesture of intimation or remembrance, and the structures of thought and language are

used to feel a poetic truth more purely. The craft of poetry, however rigorous it may be, has an almost devotional purpose.

How can religious meaning be found in poetry? Contrary to what one might expect, the thing *not* to do is to equate religion with poetry's sublime truth. When we do this, religion loses its distinguishing positive character. Religion is to be found in the language that poetic reflection is built on, and more specifically in the religious concepts that are *contextually* implied by certain words or structures in the poetry. The shape of poetic truth only becomes apparent in relation to the specific contextual discourses that poetry exceeds. Many readers see Hölderlin's poetry in dialogue only with philosophy, but this narrow focus diminishes the cultural significance of the poetry. A poetic truth beyond philosophy *and* theology is greater than a poetic truth beyond just philosophy.

To demonstrate the mechanics of Hölderlin's poetic mode of reflection and its implicit dialogue with religion, let us look at Hölderlin's use of divine nomenclature.

God is an extremely ambiguous concept. It has been identified with a thousand different theological visions and philosophical "extremes of thought," as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it ("Of Divine Places," 112). The ambiguity of the concept is controlled by its use in context, but the outbreak of multiple meanings is always an imminent possibility.

Hölderlin courts this danger by employing bewildering variety of God-synonyms throughout his poetry. He speaks of *der Himmel, die Himmlischen, der Gott, die Götter, der Geist, die Geister, das Höchste, die Seeligen, der Herr der Zeit, Vater Aether, der Sohn, ein Sohn, die Helden, die Halbgötter, andere Mächte, die Verheißenen, die Unsterblichen, gegenwärtiger Geist*, and so forth. He does this paratactically, never really indicating why he uses these different terms and how they are interrelated. The poet

seems to cross back and forth between a monotheistic and a polytheistic vocabulary, which seems to haphazardly generate a hierarchy of divine beings. At the top is the partly Christian, partly neo-Platonic/Gnostic *Vater Aether* or *Gott*; below this there are *Götter*, *Himmlischen*, and so forth; below them (or along side them?) are *andere Mächte*, such as those mentioned in the poem “Friedensfeier,” and below them are demigods, heros, and a Son (who may or may not, as we saw in “Der Einzige,” be something more divine than the demigods and heros). This astonishing diversity of divine representations points to a poetic truth beyond them all, something which no individual representation—or even the sum of them all—can contain.

A philosophical reader of Hölderlin might beg to differ. He might argue that we can organize this bewildering array of gods according to a religious dialectic. Hegel’s dialectical history of religion gives us a whole range of deities, from the immanent powers of primitive magic religions to the incarnate God-man of the “consummate” or Christian religion. One way to make sense of Hölderlin’s gods would be to associate them with various stages in this Hegelian history of religious consciousness. The problem with this approach, however, is that it does not obtain with systematic regularity, as I will now illustrate through an example from “Brod und Wein.”

In the second stanza of “Brod und Wein” (which we looked at earlier), the divine is named, and then *split and renamed* in order to prevent it from being reduced to nature or fate.

Wunderbar ist die Gunst der Hoherhabenen und niemand
Weiß, von wannen und was einem geschieht von ihr.
So bewegt sie die Welt und die hoffende Seele der Menschen,
Selbst kein Weiser versteht, was sie bereitet, denn so
Will es der oberste Gott, der sehr dich liebet...
(StA 2,1: 90)

We already saw how *die Hoherhabene* refers to the personified *Nacht* of the first stanza, which is—not without a certain tension—both an image of transcendence and of nature. In any case, *die Nacht* is clearly identified with the divine, since she is capable of showing favor (*Gunst*), moving the world and the souls of men, and guiding the future. But right at this moment of apparent deification, the poet sidelines *die Nacht* in a strange way. In lines four and five we read that not even the wise know what she is preparing, but the reason for this ignorance has to do with a third party: *der oberste Gott*. This second God seems to determine our epistemological capabilities, which he limits, mysteriously, out of his love for us (“*der sehr dich liebet*”).

What is the nature and purpose of this second divine figure? What is the relation of *die Nacht* to *der oberste Gott*? In the poet’s representation, both divinities interact with man, but they do not interact with each other. *Der oberste Gott* sets our epistemological limits out of love, and *die Nacht* “moves” the world and directs its course. Is this two-headed divinity dialectically reconcilable? Or does it perhaps point to the potential double-mindedness of secularization, a simultaneity of theology (*der oberste Gott*) and idealism (*die Nacht* as *Weltseele* or *Geist*)?

We may get more insight by looking at another poem where there are two divine heads. In the fifth stanza of the poem “Friedensfeier,” there is a relationship between *Gott* and *Schicksal* that seems to parallel the relationship between *der oberste Gott* and *die Nacht* in “Brod und Wein.” Like *die Nacht*, *Schicksal* seems to be a historical force distinct from God.

Denn schonend rührt des Maßes allzeit kundig
Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen
Ein Gott an...

.....

Und kommen muß zum heiligen Ort das Wilde
Von Enden fern, übt rauhbetastend den Wahn,
Und trifft daran ein Schicksal...
(MA 1: 363)

What we don't get in "Brod und Wein" is the direct causal relation between God and fate. In "Friedensfeier," the god "rührt...die Wohnungen der Menschen," and this sacralizes the land (*heiligen Ort*) where a civilization will arise. *Schicksal* is a power that derives from the god's touch. Can the double divinity of "Brod und Wein" be unified in the same way? Is *die Hoherhabene*, who "moves" the world and the souls of men, merely the expression of *der oberste Gott* as the power of fate?

I don't think so. The *Schicksal* of "Friedensfeier" is bound to a "heiligem Ort," while *die Nacht* transcends all earthly places. *Schicksal*'s power is localized in time and space, while *die Nacht* has power over history as a whole. Furthermore, a power is ascribed to *der oberste Gott*—the power to set epistemological limits—which has nothing to do with directing history. No specific power, by contrast, is given to the *Gott* in "Friedensfeier." It is most reasonable, then, to say that in "Brod und Wein" we seem to be dealing with *two kinds of divinity*, which happen to do very different things. The second one, *der oberste Gott*, is the most mysterious, and he is also the one called directly by the name of "God" (*Gott*). He emerges in the text precisely at the point where we might be tempted to equate the first divinity, *die Nacht*, with history itself. He emerges, in other words, at the point where the theological God needs to be distinguished from the world-historical God. It seems difficult to get around some kind of theological meaning here, especially since *der oberste Gott* is also associated with love.

In Hölderlin's oeuvre, there are a few telling passages in which he attributes love to God in an off-hand sort of way, as if it needs to be mentioned even though it plays no

role in the logic of the moment. We see this in “Brod und Wein,” where God’s love is a small appositive note (“denn so / Will es der oberste Gott, *der sehr dich liebet*”) strangely out of keeping with the cool distance attributed to the divine in the opening stanza. We also see it in the poet’s “belief” at the end of “Patmos”:

Und wenn die Himmlischen jetzt
So, *wie ich glaube*, mich lieben,
Wie viel mehr Dich...
(StA 2,1: 171; my emphasis)

His belief in God’s love has a parenthetical quality, which reminds us that divine love cannot be deduced or experienced through dialectical reflection, especially when that reflection is perpetually incomplete.

Of course philosophy is not silent on the matter of love, but its definitions do not match what we find in Hölderlin. The dialectical drive for total unity can be labeled “love,” but this has no necessary connection to God or transcendence. Other models of love, like this taken from Schiller’s *Philosophische Briefe*, presuppose the capacity for total identification with the love object:

Liebe ist nur der Widerschein dieser einzigartigen Urkraft, eine Anziehung des Vortrefflichen, gegründet auf einen augenblicklichen Tausch der Persönlichkeit, eine Verwechselung der Wesen. (5: 348)

To love God and to be loved by God require a union, or “Verwechselung der Wesen” with God, but this is permanently beyond the poet’s capacity. In the ode “An die Deutschen,” the poet tells us that he can identify with nature (and can therefore love and be loved by it in the Schillerian sense), but he cannot identify at all with the god behind nature:

Schon zu lange, zu lang irr ich, dem Laien gleich,
In des bildenden Geists werdender Werkstatt hier,
Nur was blühet, erkenn ich,

Was er sinnet, erkenn ich nicht.

Und zu ahnen ist süß, aber ein Leiden auch,
Und schon Jahre genug leb ich in sterblicher
Unverständiger Liebe
Zweifelnd, immer bewegt vor ihm,

Der das stetige Werk immer aus liebender
Seele näher mir bringt, lächelnd dem Sterblichen...
(StA 2,1: 9)

In Hölderlin's view, the divine mind is always beyond our reach, and we cannot "exchange places" with it. God is not, as Schiller says, merely "die ganze Summe harmonischer Tätigkeit...unendlich geteilt" in nature (5: 352), which is something we can identify with in moments of philosophical transport. Rather, God remains external; he is the "smiling" one ("lächelnd dem Sterblichen") who brings nature ever closer to us without, however, betraying its mysteries. He certainly does not become nature. No amount of reflection illuminates (or dispels) the *unverständige Liebe* that we feel, and this love cannot be viewed in Schillerian fashion as a moment of identification. We have here a divine love that is different from the love of the enlightened philosophers.

"Brod und Wein" and "Patmos" suggest—not so much by what they say as by what they don't say—that divine love is an unaccountable interpersonal experience between God and man. The poet knows that God loves him in a direct way, and not via any sort of intellectual reflection or insight. The model for this kind of love can come only from the Judeo-Christian tradition, specifically from a God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16), and whom we love we love "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). There are, as we will see in chapter three, certain kinds of experience in which divine love is announced or rooted, but such experiences do not

provide a philosophical handle for “explaining away” the Christian, personal appearance of this love.

The point of the foregoing analysis of divine nomenclature was to show how theological elements emerge alongside philosophical ones in Hölderlin’s poetic language. On the one hand, the poet toys with the idea of world-historical Spirit (*die Nacht*), but on the other hand he imagines a God who retains theological characteristics (he transcends history and loves us in an immediate, interpersonal way). I would argue that this heterogeneity *constitutes* his poetic language, as it points to a truth that is not just “jenseits des Idealismus,” but beyond the competing discourses of philosophy and theology altogether.

The positive character of the poetic Beyond is unavailable to us, since we can only think of it in terms of what it exceeds. Its ontic character is also uncertain. Poetry necessarily proceeds as if the Beyond is something “real,” but since it is unthinkable we can also view an ideal or “regulative” concept. The latter option is more productive for criticism, since it puts the emphasis on the elements *being* regulated by poetry, which are immanent, historical, and thinkable. In Hölderlin’s case, these concrete elements are (or at least include) philosophical and theological ideas, which, as we have seen, stand in historical tension in the late 18th century and therefore require some kind of regulation. So whether or not Hölderlin’s poetry helps us arrive at an experience of the Beyond, it is valuable for the way it brings religion and philosophy into communication.

Philosophy and the Criticism of Poetry

I now want to approach the issue of Hölderlin as a poet from a different angle. In the preceding section I defined poetry a form of discourse that puts its truth beyond itself, and can only “intimate” or “remember” this truth (or *act* on the intimation or memory) through an aesthetic coordination of other, positive discourses. Hölderlin’s poetic truth emerges specifically from the play between religious and philosophical discourse. Modern philosophical readers of Hölderlin have understood the poetry differently, however. Specifically, they do not make poetic truth depend on discursive heterogeneity, but attempt rather to illuminate the poetry exclusively in terms of *Dasein*, *Geist*, or a postmodern ontology of difference. Because of their historical importance in Hölderlin criticism, I want to review some of these modern theories of poetry and identify where they fall short.

The philosophical reception of Hölderlin begins in earnest with the *Erläuterungen* of Martin Heidegger. For Heidegger, poetry is a “founding” (*stiftende*) use of language. Poetry opens up or “clears” (*lichten*) a world-space out of the unformed darkness of Being. This “cleared” space provides the background structure for determinate existence (*das Seiende*), and in clearing a world poetry both reveals and conceals Being. This is the logic of *aletheia*, or the actualization of Being through the very beings that conceal it. Poetry brings us right to the threshold of Being because it is the place where the clearing and populating of the world first occur, and where Being is only thinly veiled by the clarity of the clearing (*Licht des Lichtens*). Heidegger would thus read the famous opening lines of “Patmos”—“Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott”—as a way of

naming the nearness to Being that enables poetic *Stiftung*. He also understands the elegy “Heimkunft” in this way:²⁵

Freilich wohl! das Geburtsland ists, der Boden der Heimat,
Was du suchest, es ist nahe, begegnet dir schon.

The *Geburtsland* or *Boden der Heimat* represents the awakening of *Dasein* (i.e., human being, or the being that knows Being) into history, and to revisit this “ground” is to return to the quasi-sacred moment of Being’s initial disclosure.

Heidegger changes the direction of the relation of poetry to truth. Instead of reflecting on a truth that *exceeds* its own language, poetry actualizes the truth (Being) *in* its language. Hölderlinian poetry reaches *beyond* the world, while Heideggerian poetry *founds* a world. The problem with Heidegger’s reading is that it seems to ignore poetic form. For many critics, poetic form is what signals the exceptionality of poetry and first puts the idea in our heads that poetry might conceal a special meaning. Heidegger seems to jump over this technical issue of form and hasten right to the meaning itself. (This is why, I suppose, he chooses to describe his work as *Erläuterung* rather than “interpretation” or “criticism.”) The neglect of poetic form raises our suspicion. Is Heidegger practicing a divinatory criticism?

Heidegger’s divinatory criticism gets turned on its head by poststructuralists who effectively replace Being with Difference, if not Nothingness. In a poststructural universe we fall back onto the instability of form in the absence of any absolutely stable content. The first to read Hölderlin in this light was Maurice Blanchot, whose essay “La parole ‘sacrée’ de Hölderlin” appeared shortly after World War II. In this essay, he inverts

²⁵ See Heidegger’s exegesis of “Heimkunft / An die Verwandten” in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 6th expanded ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996).

Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlinian terms like "das Offene," "das Leuchtende," "das Tagen," such that instead of pointing to the aletheic gesture of clearing, these terms play out language's struggle against a metaphysical emptiness. For Blanchot, Heidegger bottoms out into Nietzsche. Manfred Koch summarizes Blanchot's essay in this way: "Wer jenes Aufgehen der poetischen Sprache bei Hölderlin erfährt, werde von einer Bewegung 'dans le néant' ...ergriffen, die dichterische Existenz sei die Bezeugung einer kruzialen 'impossibilité' ...der Dichter—'suspendu dans le vide même'—bewohne seine Sprache nur, indem er sie zerstört."²⁶ This "radicalized Heideggerianism," which turns the encounter with Being via language into an encounter with *le néant*, characterizes much of the French Hölderlin criticism of the past fifty years. Just as Heidegger draws on Hölderlin to define his systematic philosophy of Being, so do the French (e.g. Blanchot, Foucault, Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy) draw on Hölderlin to define their overcoming of Heidegger and systematic philosophy generally.²⁷ They pay close attention to the systemic problems of language, which is precisely what Heideggerian *Erläuterung* seems to neglect.

But the initially salutary focus of French poststructuralism on linguistic form gradually narrows the scope of our theoretical understanding of Hölderlin, at least in

²⁶ *Hölderlin-Handbuch: Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. Johann Kreuzer (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), p. 455. Blanchot's essay appears in *La part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 115-132.

²⁷ As an indicator of his importance to the French, it should be noted that Hölderlin was the second German (after Goethe) to be included in the canon-setting *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*. For additional examples (beyond Blanchot) of the postmodern French use of Hölderlin, see Jean Laplanche's Lacanian analysis, *Hölderlin et la question du père* (1961), Michel Foucault's positive review of Laplanche, "Le 'non' du père" collected in *Dit et écrits I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994); Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Pantheon, 1965); Jacques Derrida's "La parole soufflée" in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's "Caesura of the Speculative," *Glyph: John Hopkins Textual Studies* 4 (1978), 57-84; and Nancy's "Of Divine Places" in *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991). The collection edited by Aris Fioretos, *The Solid Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999) contains further essays by Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy and other French or French-inspired critics.

France and the United States. We can already detect this danger in Blanchot's reference to *le néant*, but it becomes more acute along the American path blazed by Paul de Man's essay, "Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin."²⁸ De Man "credits" Heidegger (sincerely and ironically) with having gotten Hölderlin exactly backwards.

Hölderlin says exactly the opposite of what Heidegger makes him say.... It can indeed be said that Heidegger and Hölderlin speak of the same thing [i.e., the experience and representation of Being]; whatever one may otherwise reproach in Heidegger's commentaries, their great merit remains to have brought out precisely the central "concern" of Hölderlin's work; and in this, they surpass other studies. Nonetheless, they reverse his thought. (255)

The way in which Heidegger has it "exactly backwards" relates to the "temporality" or belatedness of language. Heidegger, according to de Man, is so caught up in the idea that poetry "states the presence of Being" that he misses the linguistic point: the poetic word "cannot establish [Being] for as soon as the word is uttered, it destroys the immediate and discovers that instead of stating Being, it can only state mediation" (259). Heidegger (as de Man reads him) thus mistakes the poet's "awakening of history" for the "superhuman task of ensuring...the mediation between Being and the consciousness of Being, its law founded in the Word." The poet will necessarily fail at this superhuman task of divine mediation, since "the restoration of Being to consciousness is effected at the cost of necessarily denying its ineffable all-presence and the no less necessary acquisition of the finite and alienated character of Dasein" (262). Hölderlin, de Man claims, understands all this, and that is why the poet employs images of the failure and destruction (such as the Semele metaphor) that Heidegger fails to appreciate.²⁹ By not taking the *finite* poetic

²⁸ Although first published in French ("Les Exégèses de Hölderlin par Martin Heidegger," *Critique* [1955]), this essay, like de Man's scholarship generally, was most influential in the United States.

²⁹ De Man does not address the fact that Heidegger also offers an account of the poet's fear and trembling. One of the five "Leitworte" structuring Heidegger's essay, "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung" are

voice, the “conscious prayer that achieves self-consciousness in its failure” (263), into account, Heidegger crucially misunderstands the poem as a whole.

This is a compelling analysis, despite the fact that de Man’s understanding of Heidegger is questionable.³⁰ De Man’s reading reminds us of human finitude and the inadequacy of human language, but in doing it ignores the guiding passion of Hölderlin’s entire oeuvre: to “remember” in some concrete, albeit indirect way, the encounter of the finite and the infinite.³¹ (Contrary to de Man’s claim, the wish to “state Being” is *not* the wish of Hölderlin *or* Heidegger.) Whether or not this divine experience—this *Erlebnis eines höheren Zusammenhangs*—is something the poet has personally experienced or only a poetic ideal, Hölderlin retains a belief in poetry’s ability to revive or approach it. De Man, I would argue, simply doesn’t believe in Hölderlin’s poetic metaphysics, and he therefore substitutes his own linguistic project and metaphysical agnosticism. His implicit suggestion that Hölderlin had a proto-deconstructionist awareness of the hopelessness of languages does not hold up against Hölderlin’s own poetic theory and poetic practice.

these lines: “Darum ist der Güter Gefährlichstes, die Sprache dem Menschen gegeben...damit er zeuge, was er sei...” The god-like power of *stiftende Sprache* can be experienced as a crushing burden.

³⁰ See, for example, Hent de Vries’s puzzlement at de Man’s “curious” suggestion that Heidegger understands Hölderlin’s poetry as a “placeholder for Being.” (“Winke’: Divine Topoi in Hölderlin, Heidegger, and Nancy” in *The Solid Letter* [Stanford UP, 1999], especially pp. 108-112.) De Man seems to think that Being is something we reach by “transcending” our everyday consciousness, and he explicitly evokes Hegelian “transposition” and “transcendence” when talking about the experience of Being (262). But Heideggerian Being lies behind rather than beyond human consciousness, and poetry can at most signal a proximity to it. In Heidegger’s view of poetry, there is no “stating” or containing Being, which in any case is not a “thing” that *can* be stated or contained. De Man claims that Heidegger’s poet “immediately experiences Being,” but this sort of phraseology seems to be a straw man. Heidegger never uses it. He does say things like: “Kein Mittelbares, es sei ein Gott oder ein Mensch, vermag deshalb je das Unmittelbare unmittelbar zu erreichen” (61); but this seems to be the opposite of what de Man is putting in Heidegger’s mouth.

³¹ This goal of “remembering” the human-divine interaction through the particular form of poetic reflection is clearly expressed in the “Fragment philosophischer Briefe” (quoted earlier) and in the essay “Wenn der Dichter einmal des Geistes mächtig...” Hölderlin presupposes a metaphysics which *compensates* for the intrinsic inadequacy of language.

The shortcoming of deconstructionist interpretation is on full display in Peter Fenves's bleak essay, "Measure for Measure: Hölderlin and the Place of Philosophy." The deep truth of Hölderlin's poetry, for Fenves, is that it seduces the reader into "taking" the poem as a "measure" of some kind of human-divine meaning. Specifically, we fill in the enigmatic, often elided pronouns of the poem (e.g. "so riefs und flog von Zunge zu Zunge," "des Menschen Maas ist's") with a significance that we bring to it. But when we try to make this assigned meaning work systematically in the poem, it necessarily fails. Fenves's point is that the poem does not arise from anything "real" that would guarantee a consistent interpretation. The true "measure" of the poem—the one that really does reside in the text itself and is thus "poetic"—is the measure of meaninglessness:

The attraction to [Hölderlin's] poetry expresses itself in a taking: one measure—"the measure of man"—is taken in favor of another measure. Although the other measure has been called a "poetic" one, this perhaps says too much: the other measure is poetic only insofar as it is *linguistic*, and it is linguistic only if language is no longer the medium in which the human measures itself against the divine; the other measure, the nonhuman one, is a measure of language's *contraction from the divine-human interplay*. (42; my emphasis)

Fenves shows us how looking closely—too closely, perhaps—at the language of the text can undermine any meaning-work that the text, or our reading of the text, might try to accomplish. But did this point need to be made in 1999? Fenves's reading is dissatisfying not only because its principle argument is overly familiar, but also because it simply ignores the historical work that the poem is undertaking. All it sees is the naked mechanism of language, which can *always* be seen to withdraw from meaning.³² My

³² In her reading of Hölderlin's late poem "Patmos," Alice Kuzniar offers a more historically sensitive poststructural approach that acknowledges the discourse of "spirit": "As the ending of 'Patmos' inherently suggests, we cannot exclude the possibility that language can become petrified and fixed when the spirit departs. Although writing arises in divine absence, it can also become endangered by the extended void—

approach is to invert Fenves's valuation of the poetic as "withdrawal" and see it instead as an excess. In doing so, however, I am not content to merely say that poetic language exceeds other language "in general"; I am interested in *precisely* what positive foundations poetry exceeds, and where the need for poetry arises between these foundations. In Hölderlin's case, these foundations are (or include) the philosophical and theological accounts of divine history, and the need for poetry arises at the point where philosophy denies and theology asserts transcendence.

In his Hölderlin essay "Parataxis," Adorno resists the implosive deconstructionism manifest in Fenves's interpretation. Adorno begins by arguing that there is something "dark" in between the form and content of a poem that requires illumination. He speaks of this as the "der Philologie sich entziehende Moment" of the poem:

Was die philologische Erklärung wegzuräumen gehalten ist, verschwindet dennoch nicht aus dem, was Benjamin zuerst und später Heidegger das Gedichtete nannte. Dies der Philologie sich entziehende Moment verlangt von sich aus Interpretation. Das Dunkle an den Dichtungen, nicht, was in ihnen gedacht wird, nötigt zur Philosophie. (3: 159)

Adorno is building on the argument in Peter Szondi's essay, "Über philologische Erkenntnis," in which Szondi chides the "philologists" (with special reference to Hölderlin scholars) for neglecting the unique elements of poetry that cannot be accounted for by sources. We need to consider not only what a poem is made of, but also how it functions. We need to consider the poem as a historical *Individualität* rather than a mere

by the lack of any possibly correct referent. The watchful poet never abandons faith in the potentiality of his language, the belief that it might evoke presence. The poet can slacken in his vigilance thus in two ways: he can harbor the delusion that he can grasp God in his fullness or he can forget the very existence of divinity" (169). I am not sure that the poet is ever trying to "evoke presence," but he is at least trying to establish a true memory or anticipation of the divine. Certainly, the "existence of divinity" is a given part of the logic of the poem; it is *not* that from which the poem withdraws.

Exemplar of its historical context. In other words, we need to consider the specific form-content relation of the poem, and not just the form and content in isolation. The reference to Benjamin's *Gedichtete* carries a similar thrust. Benjamin speaks of the *Gedichtete* as a *Grenzbegriff* between the *Begriff* of the poem and the *Begriff* of the poetic "task" (*Aufgabe*) calling the poem into existence. The *Gedichtete*, then, refers to the way in which the poem becomes a reality. It is a particular form of communication between life and art, which no amount of philology can illuminate. Szondi and Benjamin are both concerned with the "way" rather than the "what" of the individual poem, and Adorno has something similar in mind when he speaks of *das Dunkle* in between the form and content.

Szondi and Benjamin only call for the identification of the *Individualität* or *Gedichtetes* of the poem while Adorno goes a step further and tells us that we need to apply philosophy to it: "das Dunkle an den Dichtungen...nötigt zur Philosophie." Criticism identifies things, but philosophy brings their meaning to light. Criticism can identify instances and patterns of form-content opposition, but only philosophy can detect a meaningful narrative unfolding in this opposition. Adorno, for example, draws from Hölderlin a narrative of counter-Hegelian *Geist*, which he calls "genius."

Genius aber ist Geist, sofern er durch Selbstreflexion sich selbst als Natur bestimmt; das versöhnende Moment am Geist, das nicht in Naturbeherrschung sich erschöpft, sondern ausatmet, nachdem der Bann der Naturbeherrschung abgeschüttelt ward, der auch den Herrschenden versteinern macht. Er wäre das Bewußtsein des nichtidentischen Objekts. (3: 205-206)

Poetry represents an act of Spirit by which the megalomania of the subject is shaken off, and Spirit knows itself "als Natur" instead of *Naturbeherrscher*. The dialectic of genius opens up consciousness to a *Verlorenes*, a natural truth unavailable to an aggressively

rational *Geist*. “Treue, die Tugend des Dichters,” says Adorno, “ist die zum Verlorenen” (3:165), and “die ‘Waffen des Worts,’ die dem Dichter bleiben, sind überschattete Erinnerungsspuren” (3: 166).

Adorno involves himself in a productive contradiction at this point. He begins his essay by criticizing Heidegger’s philosophical reading for its inattention to poetic form, which undercuts the latter’s conclusions. Heidegger reads the poetry as a collection of “statements” (*Aussagen*), and not as an aesthetic artifact in which form modifies content. Then, of course, Adorno provides his own philosophical reading based on the metaphysics of genius. The irony is that Adorno’s reading is vulnerable to the same aesthetic critique that he leveled against Heidegger. Peter Fenves points this out: “Nature and spirit, matter and rationality are reconciled [in Adorno’s reading], but since this reconciliation takes place in a poetic medium, it never sheds its illusory, *scheinhaft* character. The poems claim to be nothing more than *models* of true reconciliation” (29). Fenves pulls the same card on Adorno that Adorno pulled on Heidegger: poetic form undercuts the *apparent* truth of the poem. Hölderlin’s poetry cannot *really* represent “das versöhnende Moment am Geist,” because poetry is merely a symbolic proposition, just “words on a page.” Does this make Fenves’s thesis about the impossibility of poetic meaning the best way of approaching Hölderlin? Is the effective nihilism of poststructuralism a more illuminating philosophical stance to bring to bear on Hölderlin’s poetry than Adornian dialectic or Heideggerian *Seinsphilosophie*?

I have already expressed my opinion that this is not the case, but the grounds for rejecting Fenves’s reading are not philosophical. Within the bounds it sets for itself—i.e., the bounds of structural linguistics—Fenves’s reading is fully legitimate. Adorno’s

reading is much more compelling, however, because it shares a *historical* connection to Hölderlin that Heidegger and the poststructuralists do not. Philosophy, Adorno tells us, is required to illuminate *das Dunkle an den Dichtungen*, but I would suggest that what “illuminates” in Adorno’s reading is the *historical affinity* between his dialectic of Genius and the speculative dialectic of the German idealists. Adorno does not just bring any old philosophical perspective to bear on Hölderlin, but takes a “negative dialectical” approach that “uses the strength of the [epistemic] subject to break through the deception of constitutive subjectivity.”³³ This is simply the self-overcoming of German idealism, which is something that Hölderlin was arguably the first to attempt. Adorno’s thought, then, is a “cousin” to Hölderlin’s own, and they belong to the same historical framework of “dialectical” thought. This is not true of Heidegger or de Man, who reject the form and substance of the philosophy of Spirit.

This being the case, the real argument made by Adorno’s essay is this: *das Dunkle an den Dichtungen* created by the tension between form and content requires illumination at the hands of a truth-discourse (not necessarily “philosophy”) *historically* attuned to the context from which the poem arises. This modified argument, which puts the emphasis on the historical rather than the philosophical, is in line with Adorno’s thinking in “Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft,” where he suggests that lyric needs to be understood in its dynamic relation to a social context, if its individuality is to be captured at all. Even the expressivist demand for an “overflow” of individual feeling, “diese Forderung...des jungfräulichen Wortes, ist in sich selbst gesellschaftlich. Sie impliziert den Protest gegen einen gesellschaftlichen Zustand, den jeder Einzelne als sich feindlich, fremd, kalt, bedrückend erfährt, und negative prägt der Zustand dem Gebilde sich ein” (1: 78).

³³ *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. xx.

“Private” lyrical expression is only ever possible in relation to the collective and in terms that can be understood by the collective.

There is, then, no real “outside” and “inside” of the poem, but only an outside/inside *dynamic*, a tension between individual and collective that can never be overcome in one direction or the other. This dynamic of individuation is at work not only on the level of the poetic image (*lyrisches Gebild*), but also on the level of poetic language in general. Whenever language seems to be fully at the service of some original, private experience, it is always also generalizing this experience.

Denn die Sprache ist selber ein Doppeltes. Sie bildet durch ihre Konfigurationen den subjektiven Regungen gänzlich sich ein; ja wenig fehlt, und man könnte denken, sie zeitigte sie überhaupt erst. Aber sie bleibt doch wiederum das Medium der Begriffe, das, was die unabdingbare Beziehung auf Allgemeines und die Gesellschaft herstellt. (1: 85)

None of this means that poetry can be “deduced” from its context, since the context is only finally determined in the spontaneous emergence of the individual poem. It does mean, however, that a poem represents a historical possibility, which can only be understood against a specific historical horizon.

Once we associate the meaning of the poem with the historical dynamic of individuality, there is no longer any reason to privilege philosophy as the truth-discourse specially adapted to illuminate a poem’s individuality. The rift between form and content can, in theory, be explained by economic, political, or religious means. The same common language (in Hölderlin’s case: German) weaves through all these heterogeneous and competing discourses, and it is because of this common language that “das *Ganze* einer Gesellschaft, als einer in sich widerspruchsvollen Einheit, im Kunstwerk erscheint” (1: 76). Strictly speaking, all of these areas must be brought into play if a poem’s

individuality is to be *fully* illuminated. Certainly they all share an equal standing *a priori* as perspectives from which poetry can acquire meaning. As I have demonstrated, religion and philosophy have equal authority in the mind of Hölderlin the twenty-year-old seminarian, and religion retains some of its power in poems as late as “Der Einzige” and “Patmos.” Both of these discourses of meaning—philosophy and religion—play a critical role in Hölderlin’s immediate social context, and a proper sensitivity to the poetic medium will not fail to register the one as well as the other. Adorno’s theory of poetry, then, implicitly legitimates a religious reading, or at least a reading that draws religion into the dynamic of meaning.

To conclude this chapter, I want to look at two essays that demonstrate how religion can automatically surface in the criticism of Hölderlin’s work.³⁴ If, as Adorno says, the poem is an individual crystallization of *das Ganze einer Gesellschaft*, this should not come as a surprise. Religion is part of the whole, and for that reason cannot be selectively excluded. Both essays address aspects of the Hölderlinian notion of tragedy, and draw on theoretical as well as formally poetical writings. In Hölderlin’s case, I think it is permissible to lump both sorts of writing under the rubric of “poetry,” since the theoretical writings remain fragmentary, elusive, and closely bound to Hölderlin’s poetic practice.

In the first essay, Anja Lemke demonstrates how the location of the divine “wanders” from language, to history, to time itself over the course of several “tragic” texts spanning Hölderlin’s productive years. She begins with the first two versions of the

³⁴ Both essays are taken from the collection, *“Es bleibt aber eine Spur, Doch eines Wortes: zur späten Hymnik und Tragödien-theorie Friedrich Hölderlins*, eds. Christoph Jamme und Anja Lemke (München: Fink, 2004).

drama *Empedokles*, where the “Wunsch nach Vereinigung” that characterized the novel *Hyperion* has been replaced by the “Sühnetod für die Übertretung der Differenz zwischen den zwei Sphären [i.e the human and divine]” (404). Unlike *Hyperion*, Empedocles has actually experienced the divine *Alleinheit*, and he must pay for this experience with his life. The crucial question concerns the way this achieved experience of the divine relates to representation. The first versions of *Empedokles* speak of the divine as something capable of being harnessed by language: “die Götter waren / Dienstbar mir geworden, ich allein / War Gott, und sprache im frechen Stolz heraus” (404). The “Versprachlichung des Vereinigungsprozess” is a problem, because it allows Empedocles, who is the ruler of Agrigento, to transmit the divine to his people, and thus threaten the distinction between heaven and earth. Empedocles’ death, therefore, is a (self-)punishment for hubris, and *not* the immediate effect of divine glory (as in the Semele metaphor that Hölderlin often uses).

In the prose text *Grund zum Empedokles*, which Hölderlin wrote in preparation for the third version of the play, we find a profound shift. The status of the figure Empedocles changes from one who *experiences* metaphysical reality to one who directly *symbolizes* or *carries out* that reality. The symbolized reality in this case is not a Platonic vision of the completed *Vereinigungsprozess*, but the dynamism of the process itself. Empedocles is “chosen” as the vessel of this dynamic *Schicksal*, which can only result in Empedocles’ death. The important thing to note here, for Lemke, is that the divine is “nicht mehr das Andere zur Zeit” reached by a speculative transcendence of the finite (as with the first Empedocles), but rather “das in der Geschichte wirkende Antriebsmoment im Prozeß des Werdens und Vergehens.” Consequently, in moments of historical

transformation, God reveals himself as a “Herr der Zeit,” as it is put in the third version of the play. Hölderlin’s essay “Das untergehende Vaterland” builds on the idea of a God indissolubly linked to time by showing, says Lemke, “daß es keinen gesicherten Standort außerhalb der Zeit mehr gibt, der es erlauben würde, den geschichtlichen Prozeß als Einheit in den Blick zu nehmen” (413).

The God of Time is dealt with most profoundly in the commentary Hölderlin appends to his translations of Sophocles, where God is no longer found *beyond* time or *in* time, but *as* time itself, the “Vorstellung selber” of time. This representation must resist any integration into the speculative whole, which means that it cannot have any positive connection to any other representation; it must be “=0,” as Hölderlin puts it, a “Zäsur” in the dialectic of experience. It neither completes nor collapses speculative dialectic, but merely brings it to a standstill. The God of Time can only be represented as the “Gesetz der unaufhebbaren Scheidung” (413).

Admittedly, there is nothing overtly theological here, but the trajectory of the development that Lemke traces has seems to be theologically motivated. Essentially, Hölderlin is trying to pull the divine—which as *Alleinheit* or *Geschichte* can easily be reconciled to a philosophical metaphysics—away from anything that can be controlled, understood, or identified with the human. At first the divine is something capable of intellectual mediation or “Versprachlichung,” then it is raised to something that can only be lived out over time, and finally it is the incomprehensible *Vorstellung selber* of time or the *Herr der Zeit*. God becomes the non-identical rift in the world, which one might argue is merely the “view from below” of theological transcendence. In the last sentence of her essay, Lemke subtly acknowledges the religious dimension of her object of

investigation: “*Die göttliche Gabe*, jene Erfahrung der Grenze in der zeitlichen Zäsur, tritt als gegenrhythmische Unterbrechung im ‘reinen Wort’ der Zäsur hervor” (418; my emphasis). According to the argument that I am presenting, the religious trajectory emerging from Lemke’s analysis should come as no surprise, since theology informs Hölderlin’s poetry just as immediately as philosophy.

We get more insight into the relationship between time and theology in the second essay, where Rodolphe Gasché tries to understand the epistemological character of the tragic caesura by returning to Kant. Drawing on several suggestive parallelisms, Gasché assumes that Hölderlin’s understanding of time is based on his reading of the first critique, where Kant says the most basic experience of time is the instant (*Augenblick*) in which sensation is internalized to produce feeling. “Für Kant [ist] der Augenblick das spezifisch Zeitliche der Zeit. Augenblicklichkeit ist die zeitliche Form, in der sich Empfindung, die das Ergebnis der Affizierung des inneren Sinns durch äußere Dinge ist, ereignet” (432).³⁵ This *Augenblick* and its attendant feeling are what signal that a given impression constitutes a distinct representation (434). If we can imagine turning our attention to this temporalizing process itself, such that the *process* becomes the impression “affecting our inner sense,” then we end up with the representation of time itself. Its content equals zero (=0), because it is time representing itself to itself. This is how Gasché wants to understand *Vorstellung selber* of time that Hölderlin associates with the *Zäsur* of tragedy.

The problem with reading Hölderlin’s *Zäsur* in this way, of course, is that it does not account for the metaphysical significance that Hölderlin attaches to the caesura. What

³⁵ Gasché is paraphrasing Gerhard Krüger, “Über Kants Lehre der Zeit,” in *Philosophie und Moral in der kantischen Kritik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967).

is divine about the experience of time as a pure *Augenblick*? To respond to this, Gasché offers the following: “die flüchtige ‘Augenblicklichkeit’ der Affizierung des inneren Sinns, wird als die Form verstanden, in der *etwas, das von einer kantischen Perspektive nicht erfahrbar ist*, für einen Moment erfaßbar wird, das aber ebenso...in diesem Vorstellungsprozeß sofort verendlicht wird” (435; *my emphasis*). This concession to the “something” which enters mysteriously through the null-point of *Augenblicklichkeit* does not support a reading of *Zäsur* as part of a speculative dialectic, since what falls out of this moment (what is “verendlicht,” as Gasché says) will have no immanent connection to the chain of representations surrounding it. It will have broken through from without. From the perspective of dialectic, the divine *Augenblick* appears only as an intractable rupture in the course of things. The rupture in time from beyond time is a formula for revelation in all but the name.

We have, then, a demonstration of how Kantian philosophy can describe the place of revelation without filling that place. Jean-Luc Marion has argued for a similar relation between phenomenology and revelation. Countering accusations that his philosophy is crypto-religious, Marion says:

Phenomenology describes possibilities and never considers the phenomenon of revelation except as a possibility of phenomenality, which it would formulate thus: if God manifests (or manifested) himself, he will make use of a paradox in the second degree; Revelation (of God by himself, *theo*-logical), if it takes place, will assume the phenomenal figure of the phenomenon of revelation, of the paradox of paradoxes, of saturation in the second degree.³⁶

It is not necessary to precisely understand Marion’s “saturation in the second degree” in order to see his point, which is that by accounting for the form of experience philosophy

³⁶ From *Etant donné: Essai d’une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), p. 329; quoted in translator’s introduction to Marion’s *The Idol and Distance* (New York: Fordham UP, 2001).

can anticipate the manner in which revelation could possibly present itself.

Phenomenology does not say anything about the content that might be transmitted through a revelatory event, but only where and how this content might be transmitted, if it were to be transmitted. Logically, the relation between phenomenology and revelation in Marion is the same kind we see between Kantianism and revelation in Gasché's analysis (and, as we will see in chapter three, in the religious theory of Fichte).

But why does Gasché point out the contact point between philosophy and revelation at all? Doesn't this put a "hole" in his Kantian analysis? The answer is simply that he has to. At the heart of Hölderlinian tragedy—and virtually *all* of Hölderlin's poetry—is an exchange between heaven and earth, and it is not enough to describe the form of the tragic caesura without allowing any divine content to pass through it. The religious force of Hölderlin's ubiquitous "gods" is too great for any criticism to ignore. Since the experience of the *Augenblick* as *Augenblick* is an empty representation (=0), it has no hermeneutical value for Hölderlin criticism until it is understood as a conduit for the gods.

To summarize poetically, we can say that both Lemke and Gasché cannot but bend the knee to the *Herr der Zeit* beyond the tragic caesura. Lemke takes note of the phrase "Herr der Zeit" in the third version of *Empedokles*, and it reappears in unmistakably theological garb in "Friedensfeier":

Denn längst war der zum Herrn der Zeit zu groß
Und weit aus reichte sein Feld, wann hats ihn aber erschöpft?
Einmal mag aber ein Gott auch Tagewerk erwählen,
Gleich Sterblichen und teilen alles Schicksal.
(MA 1: 364)

The phrase “Herr der Zeit” is not a mere rhetorical flourish here. It is one of the roles played by a God who is “too great” to be limited to *just* this role. Consequently, he sometimes chooses (*erwählen*) to act differently, such as when he descends into history to share the fate of mortals (“Tagewerk erwählen, / Gleich Sterblichen und teilen alles Schicksal”). This sounds much more like Christology than dialectic, and it clearly suggests that the tragic *Zäsur* is more than a negative space.

In the chapters that follow, I will try to focus on the positive marks of theology in Hölderlin’s work. Instead of merely acknowledging that something, *das von einer kantischen* (or idealist) *Perspektive nicht erfahrbar ist*, might play a role in Hölderlin’s poetic conception, I will try to identify concrete evidence of theological influence.

In chapter two I will look at the structure of transcendence in Hölderlin’s work. My analysis will be facilitated by a contrast with Hegel’s philosophy of religion, which ultimately understands transcendence as an illusion of imperfect consciousness. All spirit is subjective, for Hegel, which means that there can be no “outside” spirit, such as a transcendent God. Hölderlin, by contrast, is compelled by the idea that the divine is something that comes and goes. It is not a self-projection, but an encounter, which necessarily points beyond philosophy to theology.

In chapter three I look at the representation of divine as revelation, i.e., as an empirical event within history, rather than an intellectual event within “spirit.” The justification for taking the category of revelation seriously is Fichte’s well-received 1792 work, *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung*, in which the author attempts to ground the possibility of revelation a priori. The only element of revelation that cannot be “secularized” is its empirical facticity, and this core notion leaves its mark in Hölderlin’s

poetry as a kind of “kinetic” internal energy that is neither merely intellectual nor merely sensual.

In the fourth chapter I shift gears and look at the temporality of religious experience. Specifically, I consider two paradoxes: first, how the divine resists being incorporated into any rational scheme of history even though it seems to call for such a unity; and second, how the divine is represented as a material event (as I propose in chapter three) but also as something ahistorical (i.e., an intellectual “event”). Both of these paradoxes can only be “resolved,” I suggest, by seeing them as the expression of an irreducible tension between the historical discourses of religion and philosophy.

Chapter 2

Identity and Difference in the God of Hegel and Hölderlin

Hölderlin is inseparable from the history of German Idealism. Hegel and Schelling were his roommates in the theological seminary of Württemberg in the early 1790s, and the famous “Ältestes Systemprogramm des Deutschen Idealismus” (1795 or 1796), a kind of manifesto for post-Fichtean idealism, has been variously attributed to all three men.

Dieter Henrich has demonstrated, furthermore, that Hölderlin was a decisive intellectual influence on Hegel turning him from Kantianism in the direction of a

Vereinigungsphilosophie that “binds nature and freedom, subject and object, in such a way that each remains what it is and yet merges with the other in an inseparable unity” (131). An important difference remains: Hölderlin thought of the “inseparable unity” as the function of a third element beyond the oppositions of consciousness, while for Hegel the unity was the immanent manner of relation within consciousness (137-138).

Hölderlin’s metaphysical picture is thus vaguely more religious than Hegel’s, since it leaves open a third space, which has structural similarity to the theological space of transcendence.

The theological potential of Hölderlin’s brand of idealism becomes apparent when we think about the “third” as a site of action. In Fichtean-Hegelian idealism, the *Ich* or

Geist do not do things *in* the world so much as drive the world itself. From a theological perspective, this does not look very different from naturalism, since it denies God the possibility of intervention. William James made this point:

Transcendental idealism, of course, insists that its ideal world makes *this* difference, that facts *exist*. We owe it to the Absolute that we have a world of fact at all. “A world” of fact!—that exactly is the trouble. An entire world is the smallest unit with which the Absolute can work, whereas to our finite minds work for the better ought to be done within this world, setting in at single points. (567)

The idealist “God” can at most be a Prime Mover, and thus has virtually no importance or value for a consciousness caught up in history. Hölderlin, however, has more room for the gods in his philosophical model, which has an “outside” space from which the divine can *enter* history in a “piecemeal” (James’s term) and personalized way. Any metaphysics that permits God to enter history is no longer philosophy but theology. The “outside” space in Hölderlin’s metaphysical imaginary also gives the gods a place to withdraw, which is an equally theological behavior. In the language of the poem “Mnemosyne,” God can

tächlich
Es ändern. Kaum bedarf er
Gesez, wie nemlich es
Bei den Menschen bleiben soll.
(StA 2: 193)

My specific principle claim in this chapter is that Hölderlin’s God inhabits, at least in part, a theological space that vanishes in mature idealism as we find it Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Of course, Hegel did not want to be known as the man who “killed” God, as Nietzsche and others later came to see him. On the contrary, Hegel wanted to keep God very much alive inside of his philosophical system, since that would secure its legitimacy. But a comparison with Hölderlin helps us to see that Hegel’s

God is an emaciated God modeled on (neo-)Spinozism rather than the Bible. Hegel's God becomes indistinguishable from reason, while Hölderlin's is semi-rational at best. The poet continues to represent the divine as an independent principle, and this marks him (at least in this respect) as more traditional than some of his philosophical contemporaries. To see exactly how this works, we will first look at Hegel's theory of religion as laid out in his 1827 *Lectures*, and then read Hölderlin's poetry against this theory.¹

Hegel's Philosophy of Religion

For Hegel, all knowledge begins with "certainty," of which there are two kinds: that of the senses (the point of departure for Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*) and that of the spirit (his point of departure for the *Lectures*). "Certainty" is an "immediate relation of...content to myself" (134), which means that when we are "certain," we are acquainted with something (e.g. sensation or spirit) without any intervention of reflection. Certainty is a form of experience anterior to thought, representation, and even feeling, all of which emerge from and always refer back to something immediately given. Spiritual certainty is the "immediate relation" of God and myself, of *divine* spirit and *human* spirit, a relation

¹ All citations will be from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One-volume Edition: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), which includes extensive footnotes comparing the 1827 lectures to changes in the other versions (1821, 1824, 1831). My justification for comparing poetry from around 1800 to a text from the 1820s lies in the view, articulated by Hodgson, that Hegel's lectures on religion are not philosophically innovative; they are an outworking of what was implicit in the *Phenomenologie des Geistes* (1807) and the work on logic in the 1810s. Perhaps the reason Hegel's religious work came late in his career is that the concept of philosophy of religion did not yet exist. Kant had written on religion "within the boundaries of mere reason" in 1793, but a *full* account of religion from a philosophical perspective was a new thing. Schleiermacher's 1799 "speeches" to religion's "cultured despisers" offers a theory of religion, but it is deliberately not a "philosophy." The immediate motive for Hegel's innovation, according to Hodgson, was almost certainly the impending publication of Schleiermacher's *On Christian Doctrine* in 1821, which Hegel anticipated with distaste.

constituting religious consciousness. This consciousness is immediate, but it is also *mediate* because it is a *relation*, i.e. a consciousness *of* God. In keeping with the relational nature of religious consciousness, the *history* of God is always simultaneously a history of man's elevation to God *and* of God's descension into the world. What is most important for our immediate purposes, however, is simply the *fact* of religious consciousness, i.e. the fact of our immediate relation to God prior to any *acquired* religious experience. It is entirely normal, for Hegel even more so than for Hölderlin, to *know* that God exists without being able to assert anything *about* God. For Hegel, this state of proto-knowledge is "faith."

But who or what is Hegel's God? It is difficult to give a pat answer to this question, since Hegel becomes rather gnomic when defining deity. God, he says, is a "universality having being in and for itself, outside me and independent of me" (134). (This language of "outside and independent of me" seems to contradict the notion of God as an immediate datum of consciousness, but it does not; God is immediate in consciousness, but *in himself* is self-contained and independent. God and our thinking about God do not yet know themselves to be the same thing.) God is "what is closed in itself" (*das in sich Verschllossene*) (117), or truth in a hermetic, abstract state. Hegel also calls God a "substance," from which all distinction emerges and which *persists* in all distinction as its negation (121-122). Since it is intrinsically dynamic, this substance is not a "being" in the sense of a supersensible entity, but rather an "absolute actuality" (*absolute Wirklichkeit*) generating the ideas (including supersensible being) that constitute experience.² God can negate himself through determination (Spinoza's

² See Hodgson's introduction to the *Lectures*, p. 12.

determinatio est negatio) and then restore himself through a long and many-phased negation of the negation, which is the stuff of religious history.

To make further headway into understanding Hegel's God, we need to note that it is a *Trinitarian* God. (Things are never single or dual for Hegel, unless we continue on to a third moment uniting "one" and "two.") The God given as a simple certainty in consciousness is the first aspect of the Trinitarian God, or God the Father. That same God is determined in the world—through mythology, theology, philosophy, worship—and this is God's second aspect, or God the Son. Finally, God reveals himself as the *process* of self-determination, and *in* this revelation becomes the *unity* of the process, the negation of the negation, the return of the Son into the Father. This process is Spirit.

It is important to understand this process for two reasons. First, it shows us that Spirit is the highest God-term. The "God" given immediately in consciousness is only the first moment of Spirit, the moment of the Father. Spirit is "God" and more than "God"; it is the full reality of the Godhead. Keeping this in mind helps avoid terminological and conceptual confusion. Second, it shows us that Spirit is a process (not a product) of thought. God is determined through human *thinking about God*, until thinking finally comes to understand itself to be the very life of God, i.e. to be Spirit.

God, then, is born in and through the *thought* of God. God is not created in the image of man so much as *in* man (even though the *concept* "God" places him "outside me and independent of me"—at least initially). God is not so much "substance," as Spinoza would say, but rather "spirit" (*Geist*), just as our mind (*Geist*) is spirit. God and mind are the same stuff:

the highest or religious content discloses itself to the human being in the spirit itself, that spirit manifests itself in spirit, in this my own spirit, that faith has its

root in my inmost core is inseparable from it.... The impetus can certainly come from without, but the external origin is unimportant. That I believe is due to the witness of my own spirit. (86-87)

In this passage Hegel starts off with two semantically distinct things—"the highest religious content" (God) and "the human being" (myself)—only to elide the difference by substituting both terms with the same word: spirit and spirit. It is hard not to think that Hegel has molded metaphysical reality to fit the epistemological faculty: God is spirit because *we* are spirit and know spiritually.³ Hegel gives a fleeting acknowledgment to the possibility of an "impetus" to faith "from without"—i.e. the possibility that God is (also?) other than spirit—but then immediately bars this passage to transcendence by stating that the external origin is "unimportant."⁴ The divine spirit conforms perfectly—*too* perfectly, one suspects—to *my* own spirit, and the witness of God becomes indistinguishable from the "witness of my own spirit."

Because thinking about God and the being of God are the same thing, Hegel can collapse the distinction between belief and knowledge:

Faith is set in opposition to knowledge, but this is a vacuous antithesis because *what I believe, I also know*—it is a content in my consciousness. Knowledge is the universal, whereas belief is only a part of knowledge. *If I believe in God*, then God is in my consciousness, and *I also know that God is*. (135; my emphasis)

³ The convergence of God and human thought lies near the heart of the so-called "Spinoza-Streit" that erupted with Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (1785), a work that profoundly influenced an entire generation of German intellectuals. In Spinoza's philosophy, thought (like "extension") is an "attribute" of God, with the consequence that our thinking will never be anything other than an expression of God. Conversely, God (at least in his intellectual aspect) will never be otherwise than our thinking, although we may have to order our thoughts before this becomes apparent. The important point for our purposes is that Spinoza sets the precedent for Hegel's identification of God and mind. In Jacobi's *Briefe*, see especially pp. 128-157 (1st ed).

⁴ This half-hearted openness to positive revelation (i.e. the intervention of an extramundane divinity into finite history) is a common feature of romantic-age thinkers. Fichte's *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1792), as we will see in the next chapter, is a protracted exercise in making a space *a priori* for positive revelation, while at the same time dictating that nothing can be gotten from revelation that cannot be gotten directly from reason. Similar ambivalence is found in Kant, Coleridge, and other religious thinkers of the period.

Although he does not actually say it in this passage, Hegel unavoidably gives the impression that it is impossible *not* to believe in God. *Believing* in God and *having God in my consciousness* seem to be equated, and we can flip Hegel's formula around without significantly altering its meaning: "If God is in my consciousness, then I believe in God, and I also know that God is." Since it does not seem possible for God *not* to be in consciousness—God, we remember, is one of the two certainties—it is not possible *not* to believe in and know God. This rather startling theology that categorically rules out agnosticism and atheism can only obtain, however, when God is a subject, and not just *any* subject—he must be the *transcendental* subject, i.e. the very life and movement of all consciousness.

If God is the transcendental subject dwelling in all empirical subjects, what is the point of religion? Can it give us anything? We already have God within us. Hegel believes (and here he opposes himself to the "theology of immediacy" in Jacobi and Schleiermacher) that our certainty of God is only the *beginning* of religion. The challenge in religion is the same as the challenge in philosophy: to analyze and understand—to "think"—what we know only immediately. A philosophy of religion knows that God is an *unactualized* unity, which must be realized through division and reconciliation, a subjective movement carried out by thinking. Without moving on to a concrete cognition of God, the vague feelings associated with religious certainty would scarcely serve to distinguish us from animals. Hegel states that "if human religion grounds itself in a feeling, then the best Christian would be a dog...the dog also knows the feelings of salvation, when his hunger is satisfied with a bone."⁵ Thus religion does not consist in a

⁵ Quoted in Franz Wiedmann, *Hegel* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999), p.74. My translation.

mystical certainty of God's existence, but in the demonstration, elaboration, and concretization of this existence *in thought*.

Since thought plays the central role in the progress of religion, it is not surprising that Hegel regards religion and philosophy as mutually implicated if not identical:

The object of religion, like that of philosophy, is the eternal truth, God and nothing but God and the explication of god. Philosophy is only explicating *itself* when it explicates religion, and when it explicates itself it is explicating religion. For the *thinking* spirit is what penetrates this object, the truth.... (79)

The “thinking spirit” is the real focus of both religion and philosophy, and it is in such thinking (if we can anticipate the trajectory of Hegel's philosophy) that divine spirit and human spirit eventually lose their distinction. God and human consciousness eventually merge into the selfsame thing. “[Divine] spirit manifesting itself in [human] spirit” becomes “Spirit”—a *single* entity—engaged in self-reflection.

One final point worth making is that our knowledge of God (beyond our experience of his immediacy) is “speculative.” By speculative I mean that it is not made up of Kantian judgments, nor is it like a Kantian idea of reason, such as “infinity.” God cannot be known in either of these ways (i.e. as the object of judgment or a Kantian idea), because God is a *process* whereby what is in concrete opposition rises to an abstract unity.⁶ After the unity has been established, it can be subjected to reflection and analysis, but the unity itself cannot be *discovered* by reflection and analysis. This requires a spiritual faculty, which we know as religious, aesthetic, or philosophical “sense.” God is

⁶ Or rather *Spirit* is this process, and God comes to be understood as Spirit. The definition of God as the “in sich Verschllossene” I cited earlier is the understanding of God in primitive religion. This is the “Father” element of the triune God. The “Spirit” is the final and truest aspect of the triune God ushered into human history by the “ascension” of Christ, and Hegel uses the name of this third aspect to designate the whole, because it is the *comprehensive* aspect of God, the reconciliation of the Father and the Son.

an “identity in difference,” which can only be intuitively felt, not seen.⁷ The value of speculative philosophy is that it allows us to talk about the *historical development* of the mind, while Kant’s critical philosophy (to pick a prominent counter-example) must attribute the *same* mind to *all* people in *all* times and places. Hegel’s speculative philosophy not only allows us to think historically, but in fact *requires* us to do so, so that we can “see” the emergence of Spirit over time and thereby *justify* philosophy’s presupposition of Spirit. Strictly speaking, this justification is complete only when Spirit reaches the *end* of its development, and we can verify that *all* parts of human development fit into the logic of Spirit. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* aspires to be precisely as this kind of completion and verification.

Hegel and Hölderlin

Now it is time to see close up how Hölderlin’s notion of God compares with Hegel’s. To begin, let us look at a subtle but significant phenomenological difference. In Hegel’s view of religion, God is a simple certainty that rests in itself. Thought, to be sure, “is the locus of this universal, but, to begin with, this locus is absorbed in the One, the eternal” (121). It is important to note that thought is “absorbed” in God, and religion only begins when thought *pulls away* from God and puts distance between itself and its object. Only through this mediating distance can God possibly begin to manifest itself. This pulling away is always already accomplished before we can notice it, since religion is by definition (for Hegel) a consciousness *of* God, i.e. the relation of a subject to an object.

⁷ See Hodgson’s introduction to *Lectures*, p. 63.

Thus “immediacy itself,” Hegel says, “is essentially mediated” (157). Religion thus begins in the movement of thought *away* from God, so that it can then *return* to God as prayer, mythology, theology, or some other form of religious thinking. This separation from God enabling religious consciousness has not been *imposed* on the human spirit in the manner of a divine judgment; rather, thought has alienated itself from absolute universality through its *own* power. Because consciousness moves away from God, and not vice versa, the human spirit *controls* this separation making it a *relation* to God rather than a *break* with God. “The true or the divine,” Hegel tells us, “does not get lost” (213).

I do not want to misrepresent Hölderlin by denying any similarity with Hegel’s *self*-caused alienation and reunification with God. I think that the elegy “Der Wanderer,” for example, is amenable to such a reading. The “wandering” alluded to in the title of the poem is the *poet’s* journey away from his home to look in distant lands for signs of God. The poet learns that God cannot be found outside of the self and returns home. When he arrives home, however, things have undergone a subtle change. The intervening death of his parents and the estrangement of his friends afflict him with a feeling of isolation and sorrow. Nevertheless, the elegy does not end sorrowfully. The loss of his loved ones becomes a religious victory as the poet discovers that love does not perish with the love object. Love is grounded in the higher reality of universal spirit, a truth that the poet understands only through the disappearance of his loved ones:

Ich dünk ihnen gestorben, sie mir.
Und so bin ich allein. Du aber, über den Wolken,
Vater des Vaterlands! mächtiger Aether! und du
Erd und Licht! ihr einigen drei, die walten und lieben,
Ewige Götter! mit euch brechen die Bande mir nie.
Ausgegangen von euch, mit euch auch bin ich gewandert,
Euch, ihr Freudigen, euch bring ich erfahrener zurück.
(StA 2,1: 83)

The poet recognizes that the union he had felt amongst family and friends is not abolished with the loss of those persons, because unity is a principle that goes deeper than any *particular* unity. By “negating” a particular love attachment, he is able to “elevate” himself to love as a universal or “ethereal” substance. This elevation through negation of the particular is a very “Hegelian” move, even if it does not, in this specific case, result in the highest religious consciousness, in which case God would come down from the “aether” and dwell inside of man.

Poetry, however, is art, and art is a form of play even when it is most serious. The Hegelian pattern adhered to in one poem can be subverted in the next. Often, the poet does not advance in his knowledge of God by pulling away from God. Rather, the divine often comes to mankind from without, and reveals itself only in passing.

...nicht geweissagt war es, sondern
Die Locken ergriff es, gegenwärtig,
Wenn ihnen plötzlich
Ferneilend zurück blickte
Der Gott...
(StA 2,1: 169)

In this process, the human spirit is *passive*. This sudden divine seizure (*Griff*) of the subject cannot be brought about or “foretold” (*geweissagt*) by any intentional activity, such as reflection. We may long for God, but we cannot force his hand; we must await him. All of the poet’s efforts to precipitate a revelation of the divine come to naught leaving the poet to wonder (as in “Brod und Wein”) “wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit,” and feel it would be “better to sleep” until the gods come. When the gods do come, the experience is registered *physically*: “die Locken ergriff es, gegenwärtig.” A physical experience is far more dependent on the external and contingent than a reflective or “spiritual” experience. This is a crucial difference from Hegel, for whom religious

experience is primarily *intellectual*. Hölderlin's physical experience of God is sudden and discontinuous, while Hegel's intellectual experience of God is dialectical and integral. In a dialectic there may be dramatic moments of negation, but the "before" and "after" of such moments are logically unified. All dialectical experience is therefore a *single* experience without irruption from or into the outside. The outside plays a minor role in idealism.⁸ For Hölderlin, the outside plays a *central* role in the problem of religion, and it is often associated with sensory reality, which in effect keeps knocking the progress of Spirit back to ground zero. ("Sense-certainty" is the *beginning* of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*). The gods do not behave as they should. They do not fit our rational conceptions of religion. They come and go when and how they will, and this can result in something unrepresentable: "niemand weiß, von wannen und was einem geschieht von ihr."

The dark side of this dependence on the contingency of the outside is best expressed in one of Hölderlin's poems that makes no mention of God at all. The first stanza of "Hälfte des Lebens" presents an exquisite image of "yellow pears," "wild roses," and "sacred swans" leaning into a sea of "the holy-sober water" (*heilignüchternes Wasser*). The second half of the poem shifts tone abruptly:

Weh mir, wo nehm ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein,

⁸ Minor, but not unimportant. Fichte stumbles up against an outside "check" (*Anstoß*) to the *Ich* in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, which is necessary in order to turn the *Ich* back on itself and bring about self-consciousness. He cannot say anything more about this "check," and so he does not dwell on it. The material world continues to serve as a "check" to the subject throughout idealist philosophy, but never presents anything of consequence that cannot be assimilated by the subject into its own rational terms. The meaning of the dialectic is that the outside can always be conformed to the inside. (Another possibility is that the outside and inside can be conformed to something beyond them both: the absolute.) In this respect, Hölderlin—for whom the outside can *resist* the inside, or at the other extreme *seize* upon it—parts ways with idealism.

Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.
(StA 2,1: 117)

This poem is unusual for Hölderlin, since it only makes a single shift from bliss to despair. It marks, as Eric Santner explains, a loss of Hölderlin's signature "narrative vigilance" (i.e. the commitment to a dialectical narrative of redemption) in the face of a paratactic experience of the world (84). Instead of a series of oppositions and attempted reconciliations, this poem has only one opposition—moving tragically from good to bad—without the slightest hint of reconciliation. We should not make too much of the pessimistic thrust of this poem, since other short poems (e.g. "Der Winkel von Hardt") conclude on a very different note. But "Hälfte des Lebens" unquestionably represents a problem that is at least *latent* or *potential* in all of Hölderlin's work: "wo nehm ich, wenn es Winter ist, die Blumen?" This is a temporal problem. Just as life changes with the march of the seasons, so does the divine come and go according to some *external*, non-human temporality. The divine *can* be lost. The poet's ability to capture the divine remains—"wo *nehme* ich"—but sometimes (in "winter") there is nothing to *be* captured. For Hegel this could never be a problem, since Spirit only ever "takes" (*nehmen*) what it is has given in the first place; it invests the world with its own inner truth, and then reclaims what it has given. God is an existential certainty. There is no radical risk here. Not so in Hölderlin, for whom the divine comes (by grace? by chance?) as an intrusion *into* the interior.

In order to see this extrinsic divine at work in greater detail, let us spend some time with the elegy "Brod und Wein." In the opening stanza, the poet stands outside the

city observing the fall of night. The commotion of day gradually disappears, and the particular fades into a universal calmness. The poem's focus begins in the empty marketplace and trails off into the distance along several paths: he catches the sound of music in distant gardens, he contemplates the image of a lone man lost in memory, he gazes at the wonders of the night sky. The religious significance of this contemplative movement is evident from the description of the night as the "Erstaunende...[die] Hoherhabene[, die] bewegt...die Welt und die hoffende Seele der Menschen." By design, this stanza is a gradual elevation from the human to the divine, which in Hegelian terms would be a movement from the determinate to the universal. At the site of the universal, however, we find strangeness: "die Nacht kommt, / Voll mit Sternen und *wohl wenig bekümmert um uns*, / Glänzt die Ertaunende dort, *die Fremdlingin* under den Menschen" (my emphasis). The poet is "elevating" himself up to God, as Hegel would put it, but all he finds is strangeness. Why?

This strangeness occurs because Hölderlin's God is not in the same place as Hegel's God. Hegel says that God is an immediate certainty of consciousness, an "empirical datum," and thoughtful introspection should be able to reveal this to us. When Hölderlin turns inward, however, he finds the negative pull of desire rather than the positive kernel of the absolute. The first six lines of "Brod und Wein" represent a movement toward mental quietude: "Rings um *ruhet* die Stadt," "Satt gehn heim...zu *ruhen* die Menschen," "*ruht* der geschäftige Markt." This quieting of the spirit heightens the poet's attentiveness to perception: the sounds of departing wagons, the stillness of the marketplace, the faint music of strings, the sound of a fountain, the wind in the trees, the brightness of the moon. All of these perceptions are unified precisely *as* perceptions, they

are all equally ambiguous and yet pregnant with meaning. Along with this unreflected sensual unity, there should, for Hegel, also be an unreflected *spiritual* unity, a feeling that everything shares a common being in God. Hölderlin's poem never finds this foundation, however, and instead gives us images of emptiness. At first this emptiness is external:

“rauschen die Wagen hinweg,” “leer steht von Trauben und Blumen...der Markt.”

External emptiness forces the poem to turn inward, but in the human interior there is even more emptiness. We are confronted with images of transience and nostalgia, in which the truth is always elsewhere or “elsewhen”:

Aber das Saitenspiel tönt fern aus Gärten; vielleicht, daß
Dort ein Liebendes spielt oder ein einsamer Mann
Ferner Freunde gedenkt und der Jugendzeit...
(StA 2,1: 90)

The image of the *Saitenspiel* represents music, an object that cannot be apprehended as a whole because of its temporal distension. Music can only be appreciated by waiting it out, and the end of music is *only* the end—it is not an accumulation of the whole.

Likewise, Hölderlin's meditative withdrawal into stillness does not lead him back to some immediate concept of God as much as to a stream of religious desire and memory. God is something that comes to us from the past or is yet to come in the future: “Dorther kommt und zurück deutet der kommende Gott.” There is no real stillness, no timeless unity on which the movement of thought and feeling comes to rest, but only traces of this unity leading away beyond our temporal horizon. God is not a place immediately given in consciousness, but rather a place into which consciousness fades, a past where the divine once was. God is a *trace* of certainty, a *trailing away* into a previous or future knowledge. This is not an atheistic absence, since the trace—the memory, the desire—is a real connection. It is found to exist precisely in the quietude where we anticipated the

divine. This trace, which is a flowing away from the divine and a flowing toward it, an absence-toward-presence and a presence-toward-absence, is represented by the image of the spring: “und die Brunnen / Immerquillend und frisch rauschen an duftendem Beet.” The spring is a place of origin, but all we get from the spring is a flowing, a movement that has *left* the origin. The primal *is* lost, but only because it is always flowing towards us or away from us. Such a loss is an epistemological burden, but not a metaphysical tragedy (like the *Winter* in “Hälfte des Lebens”).

The divine is a receding into the past or future, but it can also fix itself squarely in the present. The next two lines of the stanza introduce a subtle tension in the temporal fabric of the lyric:

Still in dämmriger Luft ertönen geläutete Glocken,
Und der Stunden gedenk ruft ein Wächter die Zahl.
(StA 2,1: 90)

The “still” ringing (“Still...ertönen”) of the bells at twilight points to arrestment of time *in* quietude, while the cry of the time-conscious watchman (“der Studenten *gedenk*”) suggests the intrusion of time *into* quietude. We thus have a gentle shift from the suspension of time to the awareness of time. This awareness (captured by the deliberate *zahlen* implicit in “die Zahl”) intrudes on consciousness precisely as consciousness is losing itself in the still abyss of time.

This is important because the mind was not losing itself in time for lack of anything better to do. It was tracking something primal: a past happiness amongst “ferner Freunde,” a hidden joy of “Jugendzeit,” the heart of “ein Liebendes,” the subteranean source of “die Brunnen / Immerquillend.” This constellation of distant and forgotten realities creates the “stillness” of time, its gentle sinking back to “time zero,” which is

reached in line eleven with the “still” ringing of the church bells. And they are almost certainly church bells that ring, making this beginning time also a sacred time. For countless religious traditions, sacred time is the time of the founding of the world, which unlike linear time can be accessed again and again through ritual or other means.⁹ In “Brod und Wein,” sacred time is accessed through a meditative withdrawal from the external world into distant memories and feelings. What makes this passage extraordinary is the sudden emergence in the conscious present of the sacred thing being sought in consciousness’s primal past. The divine slips in through the backdoor, as it were. With his face turned, the poet does not *see* the divine. He only *feels* its presence as a breeze against his skin:

Jetzt auch kommet ein Wehn und regt die Gipfel des Hains auf,
Sieh! und das Schattenbild unserer Erde, der Mond,
Kommet geheim nun auch; die Schwärmerische, die Nacht kommt,...
(StA 2,1: 90)

The image of wind here is profoundly important. Rather than finding the divine *already* within consciousness, the poet suddenly perceives it “blowing into” consciousness as a new experience. This experience is a movement (*wehen*), but it is not a Hegelian movement. It is not like the movement of spirit out of itself in order to reflect on itself. On the contrary, thought remains *passive*, and the divine enters consciousness from *somewhere else* as if by its own volition. This externality of the divine is emphasized in the metaphor: a breeze only moves external, natural objects (e.g. “die Gipfel des Hains”) and *stops* at the human skin, the barrier to the “inner” space housing the spirit.

⁹ See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959).

There is something distinctly Biblical about this image of the breeze: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8); “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:1-2). The Holy Spirit is likewise an *external* spirit that moves past us or penetrates us, and thus testifies to God’s *difference* from our spirit. In Hegel, by contrast, the knowledge of God is a movement within an interior system; it is not a negotiation between inside and outside: It is “inwardly a movement,” as in Hölderlin, but it is *my* movement, *my* “elevation to God.” This elevation is a mental process, a “passing over from one content to another,” by which “*we* relate *ourselves* to the absolute, infinite content” (162, my emphasis).

Let us pause briefly in our reading of “Brod und Wein” to consider how the emerging difference between Hegel’s internal and Hölderlin’s external divine relate to theological notions of God. We have already seen how Hegel’s embraces (with adaptation) the idea of a divine Trinity, since it allows him to subsume human spirit and divine spirit under a third head: Spirit (with a capital “s”). Human spirit and divine spirit are merely two “moments” of spirit in general. There is no fundamental difference plaguing the relation between heaven and earth.

This Trinitarian model is metaphysically and epistemologically neat and leaves no mess, since everything communicates so nicely:

The highest or religious content discloses itself to the human being in the spirit itself, that spirit manifests itself in spirit, *in this my own spirit*, that faith has its

root in the inner self or in what is most my own, that my inmost core is inseparable from it.” (86)¹⁰

God, my spirit, and the testifying spirit all blur into one. This Trinitarian monism may be the result of Hegel succumbing to a convenient epistemological circularity: God is in the form of my own spirit, because it is my own spirit that knows God. My spirit consists of “certainties” and thoughts, therefore God exists as certainty and thought. If God were not in these forms, there would be no God for me to talk about. In keeping with this epistemological circularity, Hegel defines religion as the “connection in general” between the immediate certainty of God and the “inseparability of consciousness from this content” (88), i.e. God is my thinking about the certainty of God. The story of religion is the story of how this “connection” or thinking *about* God evolves over several thousand years from primitive nature-religion to Christianity. It is not surprising when Hegel finally tells us that the human and the divine are the *same* spirit (or Spirit), because the subject matter of religion is not the dealings of God with men, but rather our *thinking* about God. Thinking about God is the entire matter of religion, and eventually Hegel reveals to us that thinking *is* God, as long as we understand God in the active, progressive sense of Spirit.

At first glance, certain passages in Hölderlin seem to suggest a similar epistemological circularity, in which the divine can only exist *in and as* the normal forms of human spirit. For example, “Der Rhein” speaks of the gods being inert unless they can feel *through* a human being:

Es haben aber an eigner

¹⁰ Hegel is invoking Jacobi and Schleiermacher here, who argue for a religious faculty that gives us divine knowledge directly. Hegel criticizes these writers, but not on this point. He only faults their failure to move beyond immediate religious intuition and consider the role of *reflection* in religious knowledge.

Unsterblichkeit die Götter genug, und bedürfen
Die Himmlischen eines Dings,
So sind Heroen und Menschen
Und Sterbliche sonst. Denn weil
Die Seligsten nichts fühlen von selbst,
Muß wohl, wenn solches zu sagen
Erlaubt ist, in der Götter Namen
Teilnehmend fühlen ein Anderer...

This image of the gods feeling through human beings suggests that the gods can only exist within the human and as the human, similar to what Hegel suggests. But the lines that immediately follow make it clear that the human spirit and the divine spirit are not two pieces of the same, since the gods mean *death* to mortals:

...jedoch ihr Gericht
Ist, daß sein eigenes Haus
Zerbreche der und das Liebste
Wie den Feind schelt und sich Vater und Kind
Begrabe unter den Trümmern...
(StA 2,1: 145)

With this image of Oedipal self-destruction, Hölderlin counters the Hegelian idea that *thinking* about God and *the being* of God are the same. Religion must be more than our thinking about God, since no amount of religious thinking would drive a man to “break his own house” and “bury father and child.” The divine must include something other than what my consciousness contains. The divine is represented as a power that overpowers self-interest (and thinking is always self-interested). The evidence of transcendence often comes the form of tragedy and death, since these most conflict with human interests and thereby suggest the intervention of an external power.

If we return now to “Brod und Wein,” we see once again this dissimilarity between the divine and the human, although in this case it produces estrangement rather than death.

Zwar leben die Götter,
Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt.
Endlos wirken sie da und scheinen wenig zu achten,
Ob wir leben, so sehr schonen die Himmlischen uns.
(StA 2,1: 93)

Ironically, this incompatibility of the divine and the human becomes a ground of relation between them. The gods show their compassion for men by withholding their destructive presence—“so sehr schonen die Himmlischen uns.” We see this idea repeated in “Friedensfeier.”

Auch wär uns, sparte der Gebende nicht,
Schon längst vom Segen des Herds
Uns Gipfel und Boden entzündet.
(MA 1: 363)

The divine must exercise restraint, which means that the divine must be a distinct agency separate from the human, and the divine-human relation must be represented with an *ethical* dimension. The divine must be *considerate* of humanity, and revelation must be *mercifully* measured and adapted to human capacities. In turn, the human attitude toward the divine must be one of supplication and gratitude.

Vieles bat ich, zu lieb dem Vaterlande, damit nicht
Ungebeten uns einst plötzlich befiele der Geist.
(“Heimkunft,” StA 2,1: 97)

This ethical relation between God and man is more like a simple monotheism than a Hegelian Trinitarianism, because it does not have a mediating power that merges the identity of human spirit and divine spirit. If there were a merging, identifying power, there would be no ethical relation, because there would only be *one* agent (Spirit) having a *self*-relation. But Hölderlin sticks with two agencies. He knows there is more than just the human spirit, but he is not willing to let the human spirit be “absorbed” into a Trinitarian spirit, which in effect collapses everything back into a spiritual monism.

Hölderlin is not a spiritual monist. He wants God *and* the soul (or the lyrical subject), and he does not want to blur the distinction through some transcendental process of self-relation. Thus in Hölderlin's metaphors, *God himself* is the "wind" that "blows where it chooses"; the wind is not the Holy Spirit of Self-Relation blustering dialectically about. Similarly, God does not "pour himself into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5), which would erase the ontological distinction between the human and divine spirit. He does not "pour into" or "dwell in" us, but touches us from without. He interacts with the world; he does not engulf it.

In summary, the path to the divine in Hölderlin is a double one. It can be found as a vanishing point on the horizon of contemplative consciousness; or it can be found in the spontaneity of the present, in which the divine can *physically* announce itself as the *external* God. Either scenario is fundamentally dissimilar to Hegel's characterization of religious consciousness. At the root of consciousness, Hegel finds an innate certainty (not a vanishing point) that he calls God. The Hegelian "encounter" with God is really a self-encounter of the thinking spirit. This self-encounter may not initially know itself to be a self-encounter, but *eventually* it will. This transition from encounter to self-encounter never occurs in Hölderlin. The poet's encounter with God brings to light an entrenched spiritual dualism (divine spirit and human spirit without a third term), and because of this dualism it becomes possible to speak of an ethical dimension (*Dank, Schonen, Bitten*, etc.) in the human-divine relation. In Hegel, by contrast, the divine encounter is a monistic self-reflection lacking the very possibility of an ethical dimension.

Divine History and the Lyrical Subject

In comparing Hölderlin to Hegel, I have thus far focused on a religious phenomenology of *individual* consciousness. I have suggested that the divine itself is generally not immediate, but only a *trace* leading off into the past or future. Sometimes the divine is immediate, but then only as something extrinsic *introduced* into consciousness. It is important to acknowledge, however, that Hölderlin goes beyond the realm of individual consciousness in his search for the divine. Indeed, he seems most hopeful when looking for it in the *collective* experience of human history, because the gods—so the poet believes—operate on a scale matched only by the broad sweep of history: “Groß ist ihr Maß, es mißt gern mit der Spanne der Mensch.” History provides a means of “zooming out” in order to view the larger “measure” of the divine. It is the poet’s hope that this “bigger picture” will reveal a recognizable, rational pattern, i.e. something that looks like knowledge.

In taking this historical view, the poet is not on the lookout for just *any* pattern, since pattern alone cannot be evidence of the divine. For example, if we see history as a recurrent cycle, this does not show us the hand of God as much as the hand of nature. A divinity that is distinct from nature will likely carry some form of subjectivity. Hölderlin thus tends toward the subjectivist stance in the “Spinoza-Streit” in late 18th-century Germany, which was essentially a debate whether the highest truth was, in Schelling’s terms, an “absolute subject” (the position of German idealism) or an “absolute object”

(the neo-Spinozan position defended by Herder).¹¹ Was God “self” or “substance”?

Hegel, we know, viewed God (or rather “Spirit”) as subject, and defined what he means by “subject” through the symbol of the Trinity. The Trinitarian God realizes himself by moving out of himself and then reconciling the outer and the inner selves. The pattern: unity—division—reconciliation is the meaning of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, respectively. By moving out of himself and returning to himself, God accomplishes two things: first, he imprints himself on the world (thereby bringing divinity into the world) and second, he comes to know himself. Just like all subjects do on some level, God is always testifying of himself to himself and thus becomes ever more self-knowing.¹² Accordingly, when the poet turns to history, he should see more than just the fixed dualities of nature: matter and energy, birth and death, unity and division, attraction and repulsion, etc. He should also see the ongoing self-relation, self-knowing, and self-consciousness of a divine *subject*.

Let us consider more precisely just how the Hegelian divinity reveals itself to itself, since this will give us something concrete to look for in Hölderlin. Hegel says that in accordance with its subjective character, Spirit must express itself “for itself.” The only way to bring about this self-expression is for Spirit to *divide* itself, which is just what the duality of God and man represents. Human consciousness is the “othering” of

¹¹ For a history of late German Enlightenment thought structured around the *Spinoza-Streit*, see Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy From Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987).

¹² This subjective pattern is especially evident in a Trinitarian reading of the Gospel of John, where God is one (“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? [14:9-10]), and yet constantly testifies of himself to himself in order to fully be himself: “the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf” (5:37); “when the Advocate come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf” (15: 26); “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world” (17:6).

Spirit from itself in order to know itself. Spirit knows itself as Spirit (and thereby confirms its subjectivity) when it is known as Spirit *by human consciousness*, because human consciousness is a moment in Spirit itself. Put more simply, when human beings know themselves as Spirit, Spirit is reconciled with itself. Of course it is only at the *end* of the reconciliation process—or the end of history as we know it—that the identity of the human and the divine can be recognized and verified. This end point of history, it turns out, is philosophized Christianity, i.e. a Christianity that posits God as man (Jesus) and man as God (via the Holy Ghost and the Church), and that most importantly *understands* these “crossovers” as a single, unified movement of Spirit. Instead of thinking about the soul *and* God, as theology does, philosophized Christianity thinks about the soul *as* (the self-reflection of) God. The soul becomes the site of divine self-consciousness.

The development of religion toward divine self-consciousness is a slow one. Hegel’s analysis of religious history covers thousands of years. Consequently, it is really only in the *succession of nations and cultures* that we can see God and man progressing toward reconciliation. It would thus be more accurate to speak of the *collective* soul (e.g. of a nation) as the site of divine self-consciousness. Religiously, the individual is a product of his or her time, and relies on culture for its relation to God. Until, that is, we reach the end of history.

Religious history terminates in the moment of philosophical Christian consciousness, when we replace the dualistic mythology of God and the soul with the monistic mythology of Spirit. Religious history comes to an end because the Christian community and God have become indistinguishable. In this millennial moment,

the difference between the slow crawl of history and the brief span of human life is overcome as an epistemological obstacle to knowing God, because now we *are* God. Or more precisely, God and man together *are* Spirit. God is reconciled to man *in man's own spirit*, because God's spirit and man's spirit are the *same* spirit: *Geist*. They are two moments of the same thing. With this insight, Hegel opens the gate to the New Jerusalem, where the saints "reign for ever and ever" with God (see Rev. 22:4-5). There is little or no distinction between the power of God and the power of man because God is fully in man and man is fully in God. The one is inert and unthinkable without the other.

Let us make the historiographic significance of the theology of Spirit very clear. If my self-awareness as a Christian is the same thing as Spirit's self-consciousness, then I am in an extremely good position when it comes to the task of identifying God in history. I know what God is because I am a moment in the triune God, and I can therefore recognize God's self-emergence wherever I look for it. It is, after all, *my* self-emergence as well. The whole of history will be a single progression toward the *self-conscious* triune God, the God-man, which I, the self-aware Christian, am. From this standpoint, self-analysis and historical analysis are identical endeavors. We do not turn to history to discover *whether* there is a God at work in the world, but only *how* this God specifically manifested himself up until the present moment of *full* manifestation *in myself*. The (Hegelian) historian already knows where his history is taking him, and he knows (because God is a *unified* self-manifesting spirit) that *everything* in the past will contribute to establishing the present. The historian of the divine can thus proceed with metaphysical and epistemological confidence. Knowing God after Hegel is like finding one's way through a maze with a bird's eye view: *seeing the beginning and end from the*

outset, it is not too difficult—given a bit of trial and error—to find the single path that connects them.

In the case of Hölderlin, we are seeing the maze from *within* the maze, which makes it far more difficult to navigate. Not seeing the end, we cannot even be sure there *is* one. We have already encountered the philosophical reason for this un-Hegelian blindness: the absence of a structure comparable to Spirit. For Hegel, my self and God's self fall together in Spirit, and this is the enabling principle of Hegelian historiography. When there is no falling together of divine and human self, we lose personal access to the historical past, since it is no longer identical with our individual past via Spirit. We might say that the cost of lyric individualism—the “I” that can never disappear from poetry—is historical isolation. The lyrical “I” would have to yield itself up to the transcendental “I”, which can only be done in the impersonal idiom of philosophy. Even the late “hymns,” which according to Peter Szondi are impersonal praises of the gods,¹³ we find the feeling, confusion, and desire of the poetic *individual*:

Halbgötter denk ich jetzt
Und kennen muß ich die Teuern,
Weil oft ihr Leben so
Die sehnende Brust mir bewegt.
(„Der Rhein,“ StA 2,1: 146)

Was ist es, das
An die alten seligen Küsten
Mich fesselt, daß ich mehr noch
Sie liebe, als mein Vaterland?
(„Der Einzige,“ StA 2,1: 153)

Darum, ihr Gütigen! umgebet mich leicht,
Damit ich bleiben möge, denn noch ist manches zu singen,
Jetzt aber endiget, seligweining,

¹³ See “Der andere Pfeil: Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des hymnischen Spätstils,” in *Hölderlin-Studien* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1967).

Wie eine Sage der Liebe,
Mir der Gesang, und so auch ist er
Mir, mit Erröten, Erblassen,
Von Anfang her gegangen. Doch alles geht so.
(„Am Quell der Donau,“ StA 2,1: 129)

To be a lyrical self is to be an alienated self this side of heaven. The gods stir our “desiring breast” often (*oft*), which is to say they are not always with us in as Spirit. In the passage from “Am Quell der Donau,” we get a clear sense of a physical withdrawal, like the departure of a beloved (“wie eine Sage der Liebe”) leaving us physiologically disordered (“mit Erröten, Erblassen”). This physical language (“die sehrende Brust mir bewegt,” “mich fesselt,” “Erröten, Erblassen”) frequently accompanies the appearance of the lyrical “I” in Hölderlin’s longer poems. The work of reflective unification going on in the poem stops dead in its tracks before the flesh of the poet. The *Gesang* ends and takes its spiritual achievements with it as soon as the poet’s body asserts itself. The poet is left on the sidelines, and he may even feel (at least in Hölderlin’s early work) that it would be better to die *with* his song than to keep re-entering his unredeemed historical existence.

Nur einen Sommer gönnt, ihr Gewaltigen!
Und einen Herbst zu reifem Gesange mir,
Daß williger mein Herz, vom süßen
Spiele gesättiget, dann mir sterbe.
(“An die Parzen,” StA 1,1: 241)

The image for the human-divine unity that Hölderlin desires is nature. We find a perfect image of divinely saturated nature in the opening stanza of “Mein Eigentum”:

In seiner Fülle ruhet der Herbsttag nun,
Geläutert ist die Traub und der Heu ist rot
Vom Obst...
(StA 1,1: 306)

The vineyard and the orchard are physically impregnated with the power of the “Licht,” which is named two stanzas later. In stanza seven the poet identifies the poet’s spirit with the vegetable world, and the image of divine saturation suddenly disappears:

Denn, wie die Pflanze, wurzelt auf eignem Grund
Sie nicht, verglüht die Seele des Sterblichen,
Der mit dem Tageslichte nur, ein
Armer, auf heiliger Erde wandelt.
(StA 1,1: 307)

Like a plant “auf eignem Grund...nicht” (which could mean the plant is either uprooted or planted in inhospitable soil), the soul withers away. It lives with the “Tageslicht” and perishes with nightfall. It wanders over the sacred earth (“auf heiliger Erde”) but does not put down roots. This wandering on the “sacred earth” is like Tantalus standing beneath the fruit trees in hell: the object of desire is constantly before us, but we can never make it our own. Confronted with an insatiable desire, the poet languishes (*verglühen*).

Hegel might respond to all this by saying that separation—like that between the divine and the human in Hölderlin—is an essential moment in Spirit. The universal is “negated” in the particular—it “dies,” in a sense—but this negation is only a stopping point on the circular journey back (on a more abstract level) to the source. Some kind of resurrection always follows on the heels of death. Death is always *progressive*. Hegel’s choice of natural metaphor—water—conveys this optimism. Like the plant, water can be broken down and in a sense “die.” But by decomposing it participates in higher life functions, like the formation of crystals or muscle fibers (128). We cease to recognize it as water, but only because it participates in a higher form of life.

Hölderlin’s plant, however, perishes and does *not* go on to participate in some higher form of life. Hölderlin never takes any personal comfort in palingenesis. But in

“Mein Eigentum” he need not speculate on the post-mortem fate of his soul, because he is not yet dead. He is perishing (“verglüht”) but has not perished, and while he perishes he *wanders* (“auf heiliger Erde *wandelt*”). The verb “wandeln” refers ambiguously back to both *Pflanze* and *der Sterbliche*—the metaphor and its referent—since “Tageslicht” in the third line implicitly extends the plant metaphor into the second half of the stanza. A “wandering” plant, needless to say, is an odd image. It suggests an unnatural intervention, the hand of a gardener who has torn the “human plant” from its natural place. Although he recognizes his organic affinity with the “heiliger Erde,” man has been uprooted. He is on the earth, but only in an unstable, ambulatory way. As a “plant,” he feels the organic need for the earth, but as a “wandering” plant, he finds himself oddly out-of-place. He is in Eden with his hands tied.

Nevertheless, the poet tries his best to insert his individual experience into a divine narrative. A poem like “Brod und Wein” deals immediately with the relation of the divine to human history, but unfortunately everything happens over the head or under the feet of the individual. At most the divine brushes by or passes through the subject.

Vater Aether! so riefs und flog von Zunge zu Zunge
Tausendfach, es ertrug keiner das Leben allein;
Ausgeteilt erfreut solch Gut und getauschet, mit Fremden,
Wirds ein Jubel...
(StA 2,1: 92)

When the god reveals himself, it is unbearable. The divine must be diffused to *thousands* (*Tausendfach*) before it can benefit (*erfreuen*) the individual. The divine is a kinetic, physical power (“riefs,” “flog,” “ertrug”) until it passes *beyond* the individual into society (“ausgeteilt...und getauschet, mit Fremden”). Only then, as a collective experience, does it take on a rational character and become something recognizably positive (*Gut*).

Initially, however, the divine plunges us into Dionysian unconsciousness unlike any of the concrete states of consciousness generated by the dialectic of Spirit.

Eventually, humanity does *seem* to come around to understanding and naming the divine gift: “es sorget mit Gaben / Selber ein Gott für ihn, kennet und sieht er es nicht. / Tragen muß er, zuvor; nun aber nennt er sein Liebstes.” Thus it would *seem* that after an initial shock, man is back on the Hegelian track toward divine self-recognition. But this is only an apparent progress. Humanity never comes to identify with the divine. What is gained in the moment of naming can also be lost. (Hegel, remember, said “the divine is never lost.”) We see this in the example of ancient Greece:

Drum in der Gegenwart der himmlischen würdig zu stehen,
Richten in herrlichen Ordnungen Völker sich auf
Untereinander und baun die schönen Tempel und Städte
Fest und edel, sie gehn über Gestaden empor—
Aber wo sind sie?
(StA 2,1: 93)

The chosen people finally comes to know its gods, and rather than responding with “Dank”—the Hölderlin’s signature attitude toward the gods—it goes one step further. The Greeks wish to “stand worthily” in the presence of the gods. “Worthiness” is an ambiguous value. On one hand it suggests deference, but on the other it suggests a presumption to equality. In being “worthy” of something, our ultimate goal is to raise ourselves to its level and become like it. For Hegel this is entirely appropriate. This is just what Jesus Christ means: God becoming man *and* man becoming God. For Hölderlin, this self-deification latent in the idea of “worthiness” is hubris: “Fest und edel, sie gehn *über* die Gestaden *empor*.” Humans attempt to make the divine concrete through their own action. This is exactly what man should do in Hegel, but it is exactly what the gods will not abide in Hölderlin.

When the Greeks raise themselves to this height, the gods depart: “Aber wo sind sie?” This question occurs after an abrupt break in syntax marked by a dash. Hölderlin uses the dash very rarely, which makes it all the more symbolic of the metaphysical and epistemological rupture that occurs at this moment. This dash is not, as far as we can tell, a Hegelian negation, which will in turn be negated by some reconciliation. After the fall of Greece and after the death of Christ we do *not* enter the age of the Holy Spirit, where God is the universal-in-the-particular or particular-in-the-universal. Instead of God’s post-mortem reconciliation with man, Hölderlin gives us an *abiding* death, a *genuine* night in which one can only await the gods’ return:

Indessen dünket es mir öfters
Besser zu schlafen, wie ohne Genossen zu sein,
So zu harren, und was zu tun indes und zu sagen,
Weiß ich nicht....
(StA 2,1: 94)

When the individual becomes tired of waiting and seeks the gods on his own initiative, he must look for them in this “night,” where man ceases to see altogether:

Aber sie muß uns auch, daß in der zaudernden Weile,
Daß im Finstern für uns einiges Haltbare sei,
Uns die Vergessenheit und das Heiligtrunkene gönnen,
Gönnen das strömende Wort...
(StA 2,1: 91)

If we are to receive and retain anything out of this divine darkness, it must pass through “forgetfulness” and “holy inebriation.” In these enthusiastic states, self-consciousness is once again *lost*, and the divine and the human are thus *not* reconciled, since the rational self is erased. What the gods give us (*gönnen*) is indeed the “good gift,” but we cannot receive it without sacrificing our identity.

Encompassing this moment of self-obliteration, however, is a state of special awareness from which “the streaming word” issues forth. This poetic “word” does not name anything positive, since poetry is always different from itself. Like the *Brunnen* earlier in “Brod und Wein,” this “streaming word” is essentially a referring away from itself. It points to its subterranean origin and infinite destiny, and we only experience it as a *passing over* the horizon that shields the divine from our view. The streaming word can only offer thought a *flowing to* or *flowing from*, but not a stable representation. It thus performs no dialectical work.

The principle insight we gain from the Greeks in “Brod und Wein” is that the social group is an inevitable byproduct of the divine—“es ertrug keiner das Leben allein”—but in the final analysis it is *only* a byproduct, and not the *vehicle* of the divine. The history of society is not the history of God’s self-manifestation, and it does not bring about a self-conscious unity of God and man. Rather, history is the abiding evidence of man’s *difference* from the divine. Attempts at “worthiness” before the gods fail, and any gift we receive from them can fully be received only through the “forgetfulness” and “holy inebriation” of self-erasure.

It is, perhaps, *possible* that God and man could yet achieve some form of reconciliation in Hölderlin’s universe, but none can say when or how or why. Such reconciliation would *not*, in any case, be a Hegelian self-reconciliation of Spirit, because Hölderlin is wedded to a spiritual dualism (i.e. divine spirit and human spirit) that cannot be collapsed or folded into a spiritual monism. There is no permanent, inborn “certainty” at the heart of religion, as in Hegel, since there is nothing permanent and inborn about the divine. In Hölderlin’s version of the human experience, certainty comes experientially as

if from without. Consequently, it is not for us to say how or even if God will “play himself out” through history. As I said earlier, Hölderlin confronts the maze of divine history from *within*, and for all he knows there is no way out.

This is an epistemologically pessimistic position, but it is not necessarily a religiously pessimistic one. As we have seen, the ontological rupture between the human and the divine prepares the way for encounter and exchange between the individual and his God. Because God and man are radically distinct, and not just two parts of a self-relating monism, a whole range of ethical attitudes become possible between them: gratitude, mercy, supplication, and most importantly love.

Und wenn die Himmlischen jetzt
So, wie ich glaube, mich lieben,
Wie viel mehr Dich,
Denn Eines weiß ich,
Daß nämlich der Wille
Des ewigen Vaters viel
Dir gilt.
(“Patmos,” StA 2,1: 171)

If there is one thing that is most important to Hölderlin about the external God, it is his love, which would be an illusion if God and man were two moments in Spirit’s self-relation. The God of love—rather than the (self-)love of God—sets Hölderlin apart from his philosophical contemporaries.

Chapter 3

The Kinetic Divine

Denn das Reich GOTTes stehet nicht in Worten, sondern in Kraft. (1 Cor 4:20)

“We get a beautiful picture of an express train supposed to be moving, but where in the picture, as I have heard a friend say, is the energy or the fifty miles an hour?”

—William James, speaking of the “movement, the vital element” of religion
The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 546.

O du, des Aethers Tochter! erscheine dann
Aus deines Vaters Gärten, und darfst du nicht,
Ein Geist der Erde, kommen, schröck, o
Schröcke mit anderem nur das Herz mir.
(“An die Hoffnung,” StA 2,1: 59)



In the preceding chapter we looked at two spatial representations of the divine in Hegel and Hölderlin. For Hegel, God is an *interiority* that externalizes itself in order to know itself; for Hölderlin, God is an *exteriority* that irrupts into the interior—sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically—without, however, *becoming* the interior. In this chapter we will look more closely at the language the poet uses to talk about this God. In contrast to

the way that Hegel's interior God reveals himself to the interior part of man (i.e., "spirit witnesses to spirit"), Hölderlin's exterior God reveals himself to the body. Or more precisely, Hölderlin resorts to a rhetoric of physicality to *articulate* divine experience, although it is not necessarily true that the divine is *actually* a physical event. This ambiguous position between realism and metaphor allows the poet to speak concretely about the divine without, however, confining the divine to a material event.

The sense that will interest us most in the second half of this chapter is touch. We will see that the divine is not (merely?) a literal "touch," but it is *most like* a touch. Rudolf Otto would say that touch is an "ideogram" of the particular quality of divine experience. Otto warns against making the mistake, "den schon der Mythos begeht: de[n] nämlich, daß 'natürliche' Prädikate, die nur als Ideogramme für ein ineffibile gebraucht werden dürfen, auf das Irrationale real übertragen und daß Symbole des Gefühlsausdruckes für adäquate Begriffe und für Grundlagen 'wissenschaftlicher' Erkenntnisse genommen werden" (25). In other words, the divine is never *just* like the words, ideas, and experiences we use to express it, because if it were, the divine would become these things and cease to be "das ganz Andere." Like Schleiermacher, Otto bases his theory of religion on the assumption that there is a uniquely and specifically *religious* kind of experience unlike all other kinds of experience, whether rational or physical.¹

Otto's description of the divine "Moment des 'Energischen'" closely parallels what we find in Hölderlin:

Endlich aber befassen die Momente des tremendum und der majestas noch ein drittes Moment mit in sich das ich die *Energie* des Numinosen benennen möchte. Es ist besonders in der "orge" lebhaft fühlbar und drückt sich in den

¹ See Marting Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, especially the chapter "The Appeal of Religious Experience: Schleiermacher, James, Otto, and Buber."

Ideogrammen von Lebendigkeit Leidenschaft affektvollem Wesen, von Wille *Kraft Bewegung Erregtheit Tätigkeit Drang* aus. Diese seine Züge kehren wesensmäßig wieder von den Stufen des Dämonischen an bis hin zur Vorstellung des “lebendigen” Gottes. Sie sind dasjenige Moment am numen das, wo es erfahren wird, das Gemüt des Menschen aktiviert, zum “Eifern” bringt, mit ungeheurer Spannung und Dynamik erfüllt.... Sie sind dasjenige irrationale Moment der Gottesidee das überall am meisten und am stärksten den Widerspruch gegen den “philosophischen” Gott bloß rationaler Spekulation und Definition geweckt hat. Wo man es ins Feld führte haben es die “Filosofen” immer als “Anthropomorfismus” verurteilt. Mit Recht, sofern seine Verteidiger selber zumeist den bloß *analogischen* Charakter dieser Ideogramme die sie dem menschlichen Gemüts-bereiche entlehnten, verkannt haben. (27; my emphasis)

Again Otto again points out the necessarily analogical character of any description of the “numinous,” but energetic terms like “power,” “excitement,” “movement,” and “pressure” are nonetheless very much *like* the divine in some way. Hölderlin agrees, and in order to emphasize the “energetic” quality of the divine, the poet sacrifices the unity of his poem. Because of the divine trauma, Hölderlin’s poetry rarely achieves the appearance of aesthetic, philosophical, or libidinal closure.² The movement and pressure of the divine comes from who-knows-where for who-knows-what purpose thereby opening the poem up to pure possibility, or “das Offene.”

To provide context for Hölderlin’s attention to the physical and the “energetic,” I want to compare his view of revelation with the views of three of his contemporaries. First we will look at the most famous statement on revelation from a German philosopher during the 1790s: the *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1792) of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. This text establishes the physical event of revelation as a source of potential

² One exception to this poetry of disruption is the ode “Blödigkeit,” at least as interpreted by Walter Benjamin. In this ode, Benjamin tells us, the *Gedicht* and the *Gedichtete* converge, the *Gedichtete* being a “synthetische Einheit der geistigen und anschaulichen Ordnung,” in which “kein Element irgend bezugsfrei sich aus der Intensität der Weltordnung, die im Grunde gefühlt ist, herausheben [kann]” (22, 28). This study takes the view that “Blödigkeit” (as read by Benjamin) should not be held up as exemplary, because in Hölderlin’s most characteristic poetry the *Gedichtete* is riven by the *Undichtbare*. This means that his poetry is ultimately a religious endeavor, rather than an aesthetic one.

interference by a *non*-rational, theological God, an idea that Hölderlin will explore in his use of the body to represent the divine. After looking at Fichte, we will compare Hölderlin's and Hegel's attitudes toward the physical side of religious experience, and see how once again they diverge on the matter of spiritual monism. We will then take up the physicality of the divine in Schleiermacher and see how Hölderlin, unlike the romantic theologian, resists a tempting epistemological shortcut that obscures the ontological difference between revelation and reason. After treating Schleiermacher, we will be prepared to look more closely at the significance of Hölderlin's rhetorical use of tactility (as opposed to visibility) as a means of ensuring the divine its ontological independence.

The Word Made Flesh: The Empirical Moment in Religious Knowledge

Of all Hölderlin's philosophical contemporaries, Fichte comes closest—if only for a moment—to granting God an existence outside of human reason. This is ironic, since Fichte is among the least interested in supporting a religious way of thinking. He was, after all, expelled from Jena in 1799 as an “atheist.” He nevertheless upheld (as least for a time in the early 1790s) the idea of a literal, interventionist God, because there was no way to avoid this God and retain the concept of revelation at the center of his *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1792). In this work, Fichte asks whether there is anything that philosophy can say a priori about the concept of revelation. Can its necessity be argued a priori? Can we say anything a priori about the content or form of revelation? Fichte concludes that revelation is a necessary possibility under certain circumstances,

such as when a nation (Fichte cites Israel) is too depraved to listen to the inner voice of reason, and there is no chance of acquiring this skill from its neighbors. In such cases, the God of reason would need to intervene *empirically* in order to be consistent with his own moral nature.

From a theological perspective, Fichte's argument is obsolete. Since the Nominalism of the late middle ages, theologians had ceased to think of God in terms of any immanent principle of order, such as "reason," since that would limit his infinite and omnipotent nature. God creates *ex nihilo*, which means that everything created—including human reason—comes after God and is not binding on him. (The only a priori principle allowed in analyzing the nature of God is non-contradiction). God may uphold the physical and rational laws of this world, but they do not uphold him.³ Blumenberg characterizes this as a turn from Christian Aristotelianism to a subtle form of modern Gnosticism.⁴ The only thing that is binding on God in this post-Nominalist view is God's own word. In this theological light, Fichte's a priori deduction of revelation is unproductive regardless of its conclusions, since it uses a standard (reason) for talking about the divine which has no binding force on the divine.

Why does this matter? Because it makes it even stranger that Fichte writes a critique of revelation at all. No major philosopher that I am aware of sticks his or her

³ A related theological question was at stake in the famous Clark-Leibniz exchange about the Newtonian universe. Clark defended Newton's idea of a God who willfully intervened to "hold up" or regulate the clockwork-universe, while Leibniz's God, as Jeremy Campbell puts it, "is less willful, less wedded to power, and he seems to be more intelligent...[the Newtonian] God is a little more unpredictable, a shade less rational than the fastidious one of Leibniz's scheme. There is an aesthetic quality to Leibniz's divinity...Leibniz repeatedly uses the word 'beauty' in his rebuttal of Newton's theology." Leibniz's God is closer to being identical with—and therefore replaceable by—the intelligible pattern or "beauty" evident in nature. See *The Many Faces of God* (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 96.

⁴ See Blumenberg, pp. 145-179.

neck out for the empirical or “miraculous” view of revelation after Fichte’s 1792 *Kritik*. Kant—the only authority whom Fichte acknowledges in the *Versuch*—never suggests that revelation should be salvaged. (Kant’s *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, where such a suggestion might—but does not—appear, was not written until 1793.) In *The Statesmen’s Manual*, Coleridge hesitatingly acknowledges the legitimacy of the New Testament miracles, but he clearly states (in a Fichtean spirit) that they served only “to overthrow the usurpation in and through the senses,” and that “inspired writings render miracles superfluous” (10). The sense that we have outgrown the “childish” need for miracles is central also to Lessing’s *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*. A related attitude toward miracles is implicit in modern “integralist” theology (such as Latin American liberation theology), which holds that “every person has always already been worked upon by divine grace, with the consequence that one cannot analytically separate ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ contributions to this integral unity.”⁵ Most philosophers (and many theologians) today oppose the idea of “hard” miracles altogether, including the canonical miracles of the Bible. Fichte himself will have no place for them in the ego-philosophy that he begins to profess in 1794. Even the 1792 *Versuch* comes across as very strained, as if revelation were a concept that only a philosophical virtuoso could force into a Kantian framework. So why does Fichte write his *Versuch* at all?

It is partly to display his virtuosity, but it is also, I believe, a reflection of the religious habits of thought and feeling that were still strong in the 1790s, even among the increasingly skeptical intellectual elite. True, every elite at the end of the eighteenth century understood that the Bible was textually unreliable, which, along with an increase

⁵ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 206. See all of chapter 8, “Founding the Supernatural: Political and Liberation Theology in the Context of Modern Catholic Thought.”

in “scientific spirit,” made the authenticity of biblical revelations and miracles—and all revelations and miracles, for that matter—a point of uncertainty and discussion. But this discussion did not *only* generate skepticism; it also helped people identify what they really did believe, and in Fichte’s case it resulted in a rational *defense* of the possibility of revelation. Of course, only two years after the publication of the *Versuch* Fichte began preaching subjective idealism, which laid the groundwork for the complete elimination of the transcendent God. The juxtaposition of the 1792 *Versuch* and the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* could be viewed as mileposts in Fichte’s loss of faith, or they could be seen as evidence that Fichte was *both* Christian and philosopher. (It should be noted that the 1794 Jena lectures are deeply influenced by biblical rhetoric and set up a typological relation the primitive Christian and the modern scholar; the religious influence does not vanish, even if the revelation theology is absent.) The mounting secularism that *we* perceive between the 1792 and 1794 texts is not necessarily something that *Fichte* would have acknowledged. And why should he have? It was not yet common knowledge that God was “dead,” as Nietzsche’s madman points out in section 125 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. Fichte and his idealist contemporaries were just *beginning* to kill him. The *Versuch* is thus not merely a case of scientific reason “reoccupying” a theological position in response to a “residual need” left by the vacancy of that position. It can be seen, rather, as a case of reason *supporting* the theological “position” of revelation. *Both* faith and philosophy are present in the *Versuch*, which makes it a cross-pressured, double-minded, or “half-secularized” text, as opposed to a fully “secularized” text like Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* or *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

When philosophy borrows its object from theology, there are silent consequences that should be spelled out. Fichte argues that the same practical logic requiring us to believe in God also requires us to believe that he will reveal himself empirically under certain circumstances. If we think about this carefully, we see that it invites an insoluble paradox. If the possibility of revelation ever becomes an actuality—and according to Fichte we must necessarily believe that it can—then the line between the realms of practical and theoretical reason is crossed, and we have to think about God in a new way. No longer just a necessary “idea” of reason, God undergoes an ontological transformation into an object of the sensory world. When revelation occurs, God is no longer a being who *must* behave in a certain way (a practical idea), but rather *does* behave in a certain way (an empirical object). But once we grant God an objective nature, we must also grant him all the rights and privileges of an object. Specifically, we must accept that God has a hidden essence we cannot know—a thing-in-itself—over which reason has no regulative power. If God-in-himself has agency—and Fichte certainly describes him this way—then it is impossible for us to say that God will not sometimes act outside his role as a Kantian moral lawgiver. As a thing-in-itself he has this power; a priori reasoning cannot regulate the action of God in the *Sinnenwelt*, which is outside the realm of rational ideas. Once God acts outside his Kantian role, we lose all a priori foreknowledge of what divine revelation will look like. We don’t know if we will even be able to recognize it. The only thing we can say is that if the non-Kantian God operates in the world, this operation will leave an empirical trace.

Fichte understands that this non-Kantian God—or this non-Kantian dimension of God—is lurking offstage in his theory. He knows that reason can lay down a priori laws

about divine communication, but reason cannot *be* that communication.⁶ (Hegel, in contrast, *does* think of revelation the product of thought, and his critics in the 1820s duly attack him as a “pantheist” or “atheist.”⁷) When God becomes active in the world, philosophy loses control over him. Once he becomes “real,” God, instead of admonishing us to be moral, might reveal gnostic formulas or practice statecraft. Rather than denying this, Fichte directs our attention away from it:

Jede Offenbarung soll Religion begründen, und alle Religion gründet sich auf den Begriff Gottes, als moralischen Gesetzgebers. Eine Offenbarung also, die uns ihn als etwas anderes ankündigt, welche uns etwa theoretisch sein Wesen kennen lehren will, oder ihn als politischen Gesetzgeber ausstellt, ist wenigstens das nicht, was wir suchen, sie ist nicht geoffenbarte *Religion*. Was sie sein könne, und ob sie nicht unter irgendeiner Bedingung möglich sei, gehört nicht in den Plan der gegenwärtigen Untersuchung. *Jede Offenbarung also muß uns Gott als moralischen Gesetzgeber ankündigen, und nur von derjenigen, deren Zweck das ist, können wir aus moralischen Gründen glauben, daß sie von Gott sei.* (74; original emphasis)

This is essentially a scare tactic. He wants to close off any speculation about other kinds of revelation (which he does not discredit a priori as false or impossible) by denying them the title of “religion.” In reality, he opens up a mysterious and intriguing possibility: “non-religious” revelation about which the only thing we know a priori is that it occurs—if it occurs—empirically. It is an *event*. The means of understanding this revelatory event are entirely contained in the revelation itself. Or there may be *no* means provided for its interpretation, in which case the revelation is *merely* an event. Revelation is then like the

⁶ The deus ex machina that Fichte relies on to perform the revelation anticipated by reason reappears in a subtler form in the Wissenschaftslehre, where the “positing” force of the primal self requires an external “Anstoß” in order to turn back onto itself and bring about self-consciousness. This *Anstoß* is a rational necessity (like revelation), but whether or not this *Anstoß* will actually occur is completely out of the control of the positing self. It is a radically independent—one might even say transcendent—reality.

⁷ See *Lectures*, p. 159-160, where Hegel interprets revelation as the *content* of religious instruction rather than as the *source* of the content of religious instruction. See also Hodgson’s introduction, p. 21-22 on the attacks being leveled against Hegel’s speculative rather than “positive” approach to Christian history.

Johannine wind that “blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” At most it might leave an affective trace, as when Hölderlin writes: “Törrig rede ich. Es ist die Freude.”

This philosophically impenetrable God of the event is a specter that necessarily accompanies the idea of revelation. Hegel understood this and avoided revelation almost altogether in his mature philosophy. Fichte knows that a concept of revelation unregulated by a priori principles threatens “aller Schwärmerei Tor und Türe zu öffnen” (34). Hölderlin, however, is attracted by its hidden depths, and he does not seem to share any of Fichte’s anxiety about *Schwärmerei*. The reason is simple: unlike Fichte, Hölderlin does not hasten to resolve the revelatory event into a meaning. He feels no need to call it “*Schwärmerei*,” “the moral law,” “self-assertion of the positing subject,” “self-mediation of Spirit,” “intuition of the universe,” or even the “word of God.” It remains a *moment of irruption into the material world*. I now want to shift my focus to Hölderlin, and show how he represents the divine event through images of bodily experience, which in turn suggest an irrational, transcendent source for revelation.

The first point to make is that Hölderlin rejects the God of moral reason. When the moral God speaks, his voice is indistinguishable from reason, and the revelatory event vanishes beneath this identity of the immanent and the transcendent. If Hölderlin is to investigate the divine event in any sustained way, he must do away with the God of reason.

It turns out to be very easy to dissociate Hölderlin from the moral God, since nowhere in Hölderlin’s poetry does the divine communicate moral knowledge or ally itself with moral principles. Indeed, the great mystery of religious history—the

disappearance of the gods in the modern age—apparently has little or nothing to do with a moral error on the part of humanity. God has simply disappeared, and man is left with mere threads from which to reconstruct a divine motive. Furthermore, the poet never expects to be rewarded as he might from a moral God. On the contrary, the poet prays that God will stay away: “Vieles sprach ich zu ihm...Vieles bat ich, zu lieb dem Vaterlande, damit nicht / Ungebeten uns einst plötzlich befiele der Geist” (StA 2,1: 97).

This is because we cannot handle God:

Auch wär' uns, sparte der Gebende nicht,
Schon längst vom Seegen des Herds
Uns Gipfel und Boden entzündet.
(MA 1: 363)

God's bounty can be a curse in its very excess. Although the poet is convinced of his benevolence, God is an unprincipled power that quickly becomes incompatible with human existence. It is too powerful and strange. So why does Hölderlin cling to this strange God and not flee to the God of reason? He seems to have no choice. The irrational God, in Hölderlin's eyes, is the one responsible for religious history and poetic genius, and in his absence we are impotent: “Indessen dünket mir öfters / Besser zu schlafen...wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit[?]” (StA 2,1: 94). Again and again we are reminded that the Greeks thrived because the gods lived among them, while today the gods have left us and we have sunk into an enfeebling darkness, a “night” of the gods.

Hölderlin's God is thus not the God of Kantian philosophy, nor is it the God of early idealism, which does not acknowledge the category of transcendence. Since he is not relying openly on the Christian tradition, the poet is left without an established language for his representation of revelation. The poem does not know what divine communication will look like or contain, just as Fichte described in his discussion of non-

rational revelation. The gods live “über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt” and we cannot force their appearance. The gods come strangely, paradoxically: “Unempfunden kommen sie erst.” We are forced to wait them out—“harren,” as it is put in “Brod und Wein.”

The problem with waiting is that we do not know what we are waiting for. Without a priori guidelines to help us identify non-moral revelation, we may not even know that it has occurred, although we may, in a sense, experience it *occurring*. This is suggested by the use of the present tense in the line from “Brod und Wein”:

niemand / Weiß, von wannen und was einem *geschiehet* von ihr...

A thing is only real—it only become complete or “perfect”—when it *has* occurred (“ist geschehen”), but such completion never comes in Hölderlin’s poetry. The most dramatic, and yet most subtle, example of this divine incompleteness may be the topological poem *Andenken*. Here God is never mentioned by *any* name, and yet there is something vaguely divine in certain of its images:

Mancher
Trägt Scheue, an die Quelle zu gehn;
Es beginnet nämlich der Reichtum
Im Meere.

....

Es nehmet aber
Und gibt Gedächtnis die See...
(StA 2,1: 189)

These pregnant images are not commented on in the poem, but an awareness of their conspicuous fullness announces itself in the last line of the poem:

Was bleibt aber, stiften die Dichter.
(StA 2,1: 189)

The implication is that there is something about the objects of memory that exceeds the mere recollection of them. The *Dichter* can only capture a fragment (“Was bleibet”) of this, perhaps nothing more than the awareness of the excess. What the poets establish (*stiften*) is thus not a rational knowledge of the divine, but a sensitivity to divine presence. Poetry is a way of *experiencing* the divine; it is never a finished *experience*.

The reader experiences the ever-materializing but never-materialized God as a difficulty in isolating the “where” and the “what” of the divine in a passage where the divine is nevertheless physically at work. For example, where and what is the divine in the following passage from “Friedensfeier”?

Leichtatmende Lüfte
Verkünden euch schon,
Euch kündet das rauchende Tal
Und der Boden, der vom Wetter noch drönet,
Doch Hoffnung rötet die Wangen,
Und vor der Türe des Hauses
Sitzt Mutter und Kind,
Und schauet den Frieden
Und wenige scheinen zu sterben,
Es hält ein Ahnen die Seele,
Vom goldnen Lichte gesendet,
Hält ein Versprechen die Ältesten auf.
(MA 1: 365)

This passage seems straightforward, and we might think that the “where” and “what” of the divine are not far to be found. The “where” is nature, and the “what” is the divine infusion that so often accompanies nature. The “gods” seem to play no role in this pantheistic moment. True, in the second line and third line we have the word “euch,” which is a reference to the “Unsterblichen” mentioned in the preceding stanza. But after this initial God-reference, which is already softened into a mere pronoun, there is no

mention of the gods at all. Divinity seems to settle directly into nature. We are not far from a Wordsworthian “blessed mood,” when

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.⁸

The “life of things,” opened up to us by the “power of harmony” and the “power of joy,” is nothing less the God of pantheism, the “one life within us and abroad,” the *single* “motion,” as Wordsworth says, coursing through the setting sun and the mind of man. The “life of things” is Life itself. Isn’t this what Hölderlin means in the lines: “Und wenige scheinen zu sterben / Es hält ein Ahnen die Seele?”

Wordsworth’s blessed mood, however, feeds into a modern psychologizing approach to religion. It can, for instance, be “explained away” as an “oceanic feeling,” which Freud exposes in *Civilization and its Discontents* as a remnant of infantile narcissism.⁹ Or, looking to Hölderlin’s contemporary Friedrich Schleiermacher, the blessed mood could be the feeling generated by a special religious “faculty,” which doesn’t require transcendence at all. Is the revelatory event in Hölderlin reducible after all to an immanent “spiritual” process fully accounted for by theory? What about the physical irruption *into* the world by an outside power?

⁸ Wordsworth, William and S.T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), ed. W.J.B. Owen, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969), p. 113.

⁹ “...originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it...the ideational contents appropriate to it would be precisely those of limitlessness and of a bond with the universe—the same idea with which my friend elucidated the ‘oceanic feeling.’” *Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), p. 724-725.

A closer reading of this passage suggests that the “blessed mood” and the psychological approach miss something. Specifically, there are various elements in the passage that dislocate the divine temporally, placing it outside the here-and-now in which the blessed mood occurs. For example, the word “verkünden” in the second line puts the divine (however we understand it) into the future, and thus distinguishes it from the “Leichtatmende Lüfte,” „das rauchende Tal,” and „der Boden, der vom Wetter noch drönet,” which would be the incarnations of God in a pantheist philosophy. The words “Ahnem” and “Versprechen” perform the same kind of temporal dislocation. We intimate something that is not yet there, and a promise points to something that is not yet the case.¹⁰

The “Versprechen” distances the divine from the present scene in yet another way. The “Versprechen” is “sent from the golden light,” which tells us that the “Versprechen” is not the direct experience of the divine. Rather it *mediates* the “golden light,” which, it turns out, is *also* not the divine, since light is something generated and not something self-generating. It, too, must have a source. With these multiple mediations, we become aware that however exalted the immanent scene is, something central to its meaning is tucked away *beyond our temporal and spatial horizon*. Even in this blessed mood, we remain conscious that the divine is hidden from us.

So why does this passage feel saturated with the divine, if the divine is elsewhere? The answer comes in the role played by the body. The first thing to understand is that the

¹⁰ This sense of promise and anticipation is similar to the temporality of the “future perfect” that Alice Kuzniar discusses in her reading of German romanticism. The divine is neither a future point in time (*futurus*) nor a divine interruption of time (*adventus*), but a negotiation between the two. It is an immediate presence whose fullness is paradoxically deferred. If we could somehow get *beyond* time (the “future”), we would then in retrospect (the “perfect”) perceive the hidden nature of divine experienced *in* time. See *Delayed Endings: Nonclosure in Novalis and Hölderlin* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1987), esp. 68-71.

body can relate to experience in two ways: first, it can be the direct source of experience, as when I feel a breeze; second, it can react to an intellectual experience, as when I cry at a sad movie. In both cases the body is bound to our emotions, but not in the same way. In the first case, an emotion *follows* a merely bodily experience (i.e., feeling the breeze) *alerting* us to a meaning in the experience; in the second case (i.e., crying at a sad movie) the emotion has no epistemological value; it is merely part of the body's reaction to the mind, which already knows (we'll assume) that the movie is sad.

Now, the "blessed mood" is an intellectual experience, a kind of intense aesthetic perception of beauty. Wordsworth tells us that "Almost suspended, we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul" when we sense the divine. If emotion and bodily sensation were to play a role in Wordsworth's representation of the divine, they would be of the second kind: a follow up to the intellectual event that takes place during bodily "suspension." Hölderlin, in contrast, gives the body a primary role. He gives us bodily and emotional language ("Hoffnung rötet die Wangen," "Es hält ein Ahnen die Seele," „Hält ein Versprechen die Ältesten auf“), but as we have just seen, this is not because the divine has been intellectually given. God is temporally and spatially displaced from the poet's representation of nature. What we get, then, is an *intellectually unmediated* flushing of the cheeks with hope, gripping of the soul with anticipation, and „holding up“ (*aufhalten*) of the elderly with a sense of promise. All of this happens at once, as if in response to the same intellectual event, but it turns out that this bodily-affective response *is* the event. There is no Wordsworthian „life of things“ unveiling itself to the poetic mind; rather, the divine reveals itself directly to the body and the emotions, as if to ensure that God not be confused with reason.

Now, just because the bodily-affective experience is not intellectually mediated does not mean that the intellect plays no role in this story. The terms *Hoffnung*, *Ahnen*, and *Versprechen* push the affective component of the divine experience right to the threshold of thought. This turns out to be crucial, since without this intellectual follow-up we would never know to speak of the experience as “divine.” The feelings of *Hoffnung*, *Ahnen*, and *Versprechen* tell us two things: 1) because they point to a completion beyond themselves, they suggest a source that is also beyond the immanent; 2) since the transcendent source/object of experience inspires hope and a sense of promise, it must be good. This combination of transcendence and goodness is what first gives us the warrant to talk about the „divine“ in this stanza.

Through this admittedly very subtle example, we see that Hölderlin wants the experience of the divine to retain an empirical basis, which brings us back full-circle to the point made about revelation in Fichte. God can reveal himself as the Kantian moral Lawgiver, or he can reveal himself in some other way. The only thing we can be sure of when God chooses “another way” is that the revelation will be an empirical event, and any further knowledge about the divine (e.g. that it is good and transcendent) will have to come from the revelation itself (e.g. the feelings of *Hoffnung*, *Ahnen*, *Versprechen*). Later in this chapter we will look at less minimalist representations of revelation as a physical event, but before doing so we need to look at Hegel’s and Schleiermacher’s treatment of the bodily experience of God.

Hegel’s God, as we have seen, is subjective, and the idea of encountering him empirically may seem strange, but Hegel is canny enough to know that his philosophy of

religion will be less convincing without an account of the visceral experience of God. So he does his best.

Not unlike Hölderlin, Hegel wants to imagine a feeling of God independent of any prior notion of God: “When I know God...then consciousness has made its entrance, and with it a parting or division that was not yet in feeling. Consciousness is the ejection of the content out of feeling...” (140). In other words, there is a pure, undivided feeling of God preceding any consciousness of God. It is, moreover, a *bodily* feeling, the kind that could potentially announce the empirical event of revelation:

the particularity of our own person is its corporeality so that feeling pertains also to this corporeal side. With aroused feelings, the blood becomes agitated and we become warm around the heart. That is the character of feeling.... It is required not only that we know God...but that [he] should be in our feeling, in our hearts. (138)

So far this seems like it could be a bodily-affective revelation of the divine similar to the one we just looked at in Hölderlin, but Hegel’s view of the event is actually very different. Although Hegel’s God-feeling precedes any consciousness of God, this does not mean that the subject does not *already know* God. Indeed, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, the subject—at least in its transcendental aspect—*contains* God. God is not introduced in experience, but only discovered. The distinction between the power of God and the presence of God falls flat in Hegel, because God is quite literally present “*in* our feeling, *in* our hearts.” God and the feeling are the same thing. God does not *cause* the feeling, because he *is* the feeling. Being non-philosophers, we just are not yet aware of the fact.

Hegel goes even further. Even though God is in the heart, the heart does not cease to be the seat of subjectivity. The heart is still identified with the subject, and what really

happens in religious feeling is that the God-in-the-heart and the subject become identical: “we, as subjects, are supposed to have identified ourselves with such content [i.e., the God-feeling]...the phrase ‘religion of the heart’ expresses this *identification of the content with the subjectivity and personality of the individual*” (139; my emphasis). In religious feeling, an ontological blurring of God and subject begins to take place. This blurring will be temporarily stalled during the mythological or “representational” stage of religious history (during which we represent God as something outside of ourselves), but the identity of God and self returns and culminates in the idea of Spirit.

In the last chapter we saw that Hölderlin understands God quite differently. God is *fundamentally* external, and not just *apparently* so during the “representational” phase of religious development. Religious feeling is therefore not a “warmness around the heart” ready-made to be identified with the subject. The divine is too diverse and unpredictable for that. Sometimes Hölderlin’s God strikes like a thunderbolt. Sometimes he announces his coming, but never arrives (i.e., “der kommende Gott” of “Brod und Wein”). Sometimes he stops for a moment and then trails away. Sometimes he distresses the heart terribly as if God and man were completely incompatible. Sometimes he abandons us without explanation. Sometimes he just stands before us as something strange. Never does he settle down into and *become* the human heart.

Hegel upholds the identity of God and the subject by explaining the representational stage of religion, in which God is placed outside of us, as a passing negation of an underlying sameness. Hölderlin negotiates the relationship between divine feeling and divine representation in a different, non-Hegelian way, which is captured in the image of “der kommende Gott.” This God, who is coming but has not arrived, evokes

the anxiety of anticipation—a feeling—but this particular feeling only makes sense in connection with a certain representation: God as a thing-over-there poised to move over here. The feeling demands the representation of difference, and the representation of difference only makes sense in relation to the feeling. By making representation—which divides the subject from the object—*immediately* attendant on the divine feeling, Hölderlin suggests that there will be no identity of God and the subject at *any* level of religious development. Both Hölderlin and Hegel see religion beginning with a sense of divine certainty, but only Hegel attributes this certainty to our inward possession of God. This possession is confirmed by feeling, temporarily negated by representation, and regained by thought.¹¹ For Hölderlin, our divine certainty is acquired through experience—an event—which means that representation is potentially involved from the very beginning. Because our religious certainty is mediated through physical experience (or to be more exact: most like something mediated physical experience), our certainty will never equal God, as it does for Hegel. We have experience *with* God, but not experience *of* God.

The Hölderlinian encounter with God has its closest parallel in our third figure: the romantic theologian Schleiermacher. The principle thesis of Schleiermacher's highly influential and controversial first book, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799)—which Hölderlin owned and read—is that religion boils down to a certain kind of intuition (*Anschauung*) in which the subject is annihilated before the totality of the universe. The distinction between God and our religious experience is explicit: “ob [ein Mensch] zu seiner Anschauung einen Gott hat, das hängt ab von der Richtung seiner

¹¹ The precise order of Hegel's evolution of religious consciousness as outlined in Part One, Sect. B of the 1827 *Lectures on Religion* is: immediate knowledge—feeling—representation—thought.

Fantasie” (245). God is ancillary to religion, and an atheist can be just as genuinely religious as a theist. (“[A]uf meinem Standpunkt und nach meinen Euch bekannten Begriffen [kann] der Glaube ‘kein Gott, keine Religion’ gar nicht statt finden” [243]). What matters is the *quality* of the intuition, rather than the concepts framing it. Like the empiricists and the post-Kantians, Schleiermacher is placing epistemology before metaphysics. In simpler terms, he is putting the question of *how* we experience before the question of *what* we experience. The imagination steps in *after the fact* to put some kind of content (often God) into the intuition. All of this is not unlike what I have been describing in Hölderlin.

There is an important difference between Hölderlin and Schleiermacher, however, which gets us to the real uniqueness of Hölderlin’s discourse on the divine. To illuminate this difference, we first need to look at a key passage (known as the “love scene”) from Schleiermacher’s *Speeches*. This passage gives us a step-by-step commentary on the process of religious experience. Notice the gradual movement from the divine being a physical *sensation* (Schleiermacher calls it an “Erscheinung” and a “Begebenheit”) to the divine being a contemplable *form*:

Jener erste geheimnißvolle Augenblick, der bei jeder sinnlichen Wahrnehmung vorkommt, ehe noch Anschauung und Gefühl sich trennen, wo der Sinn und sein Gegenstand gleichsam in einander gefloßen und Eins geworden sind, ehe noch beide an ihren ursprünglichen Plaz zurückkehren—ich weiß wie unbeschreiblich er ist, und wie schnell er vorüber geht, ich wollte aber Ihr könntet ihn festhalten und auch in der höheren und göttlichen religiösen Thätigkeit des Gemüths ihn wieder erkennen.... Flüchtig ist er und durchsichtig wie der erste Duft womit der Thau die erwachten Blumen anhaucht, schamhaft und zart wie ein jungfräulicher Kuß, heilig und fruchtbar wie eine bräutliche Umarmung; ja nicht *wie* dies, sondern er *ist* alles dieses *selbst*. Schnell und zauberisch entwickelt sich eine Erscheinung eine Begebenheit zu einem Bilde des Universums. So wie sie sich formt die geliebte und immer gesuchte Gestalt, flieht ihr meine Seele entgegen.... Ich liege am Busen der unendlichen Welt: ich bin in diesem Augenblick ihre Seele, denn ich fühle alle ihre Kräfte und ihr unendliches Leben, wie mein eigenes, sie ist in

diesem Augenblicke mein Leib, denn ich durchdringe ihre Muskeln und ihre Glieder wie meine eigenen, und ihre innersten Nerven bewegen sich nach meinem Sinn und meiner Ahndung wie die meinigen. Die geringste Erschütterung, und es verweht die heilige Umarmung, und nun erst steht die Anschauung vor mir als eine abgesonderte Gestalt, ich meße sie, und sie spiegelt sich in der offenen Seele wie das Bild der sich entwindenden Geliebten in dem aufgeschlagenen Auge des Jünglings, und nun erst arbeitet sich das Gefühl aus dem Innern empor, und verbreitet sich wie die Röthe der Schaam und der Lust auf seiner Wange. Dieser Moment ist die höchste Blüthe der Religion. (221-222)

Schleiermacher (not unlike Wordsworth and Blake) suggests that every perception can potentially be the source of a religious experience (“bei jeder sinnlichen Wahrnehmung vorkommt”). There is subtle indecision in this passage, however, as to whether the stuff of religion is found in the perception or in the reflection on the perception. Hegel will argue that religion—like everything—only begins with reflection, since God only appears as my *thinking about* God. Schleiermacher obviously approaches the matter differently. He celebrates the experience of an immediacy that is *unmediated* by thought, an “erste[r] geheimnißvolle[r] Augenblick...*ehe* noch Anschauung und Gefühl sich trennen.” Put this way, the “mysterious first moment” sounds a lot like Hegel’s “un-parted,” “undivided” feeling prior to consciousness. (Hegel made sure this was the case, since he trying to overcome Schleiermacher and Jacobi by situating their theories *within* his own more comprehensive system.) But Schleiermacher’s feeling has a different “story” than Hegel’s; it comes more like a miraculous intervention than a gestation of Spirit. It is sudden, unpredictable, and overwhelming. As in Hölderlin, it may be there one moment, and not the next. It is not the middle stage of a subjective process—as in the Hegelian progression: certainty, feeling, representation, thought—but a real event.

Nevertheless, Schleiermacher does transform religious intuition into something over which he can take rational mastery. In the “love scene,” Schleiermacher quickly

makes a division between the “fleeting and transparent” (“flüchtig...durchsichtig“) feeling that “schnell...vorüber geht,” and the “Bilde des Universums” that “steht...vor mir als eine abgesonderte Gestalt.” The *form* of religion only emerges when the initial *contact*—the “Erscheinung...Begebenheit” of the divine “anhauch[en]...Kuß...Umarmung”—is past and gone. The emergence of the divine *form* from the ashes of the divine *contact* initiates a *second* physical encounter of a very different sort. We are still in the realm of the erotic, but whereas the *Anhauch*, *Kuß*, and *Umarmung* of the first contact are tender, the second contact is violent and narcissistic: “Ich liege am Busen der unendlichen Welt: *ich* bin in diesem Augenblick ihre Seele, denn ich fühle alle ihre Kräfte und ihr unendliches Leben, *wie mein eigenes*, sie ist in diesem Augenblicke *mein Leib*, denn ich *durchdringe* ihre Muskeln und ihre Glieder *wie meine eigenen*, und ihre innersten Nerven bewegen sich nach *meinem* Sinn und *meiner* Ahndung *wie die meinigen*.” Religion is no longer about dissolution, but domination. “[I]ch durchdringe ihre Muskeln und ihre Glieder wie meine eigenen, und ihre innersten Nerven bewegen sich nach meinem Sinn und meiner Ahndung” is clearly an act of colonization. The poet rises above nature, masters it, and conforms it to his own image, and this colonization is called the “höchste Blüthe der Religion.”¹²

The only reason that the religious subject can ravish the divine the second time around is that the divine is now treated as a *thing* rather than an event or encounter. Schleiermacher represents the divine not as difference (“der kommende Gott”), but as a finished object waiting to be seized. In Martin Buber’s terms, Schleiermacher allows the

¹² Schleiermacher would likely be horrified to hear his religious theory described in this way, but the author’s “intention” and the implications of his rhetoric are at odds. His subjective “colonization” of the religious object is not unrelated, in any case, to Kant’s subjecivization of the sublime, and thus in keeping with the historical moment.

world of “relation” (*Beziehung*), or the “Duwelt,” to collapse into the world of “experience” (*Erfahrung*), or the “Eswelt.” Rather than a “kiss” or “embrace,” the divine is now an “image” or “form.” This form is created by the human subject’s imagination, and becomes its intellectual possession. When we consider that such forms become (in Schleiermacher’s theory) the template for religious worldviews, religion starts looking a lot like “enlightened” reason: both subject the irrational (nature or the divine) to the shape of human thought. In order to do this, thought must treat the irrational like a “thing.” Neither reason nor religion seems to have much patience for “events” and “encounters,” which resist being hefted, sorted, and stacked within conceptual schemas.

Let us now contrast Schleiermacher’s reifying “love scene” with a passage from Hölderlin’s “Friedensfeier” that we encountered in chapter one. Here there is also a seminal divine moment (*Augenblick*), which plays itself out very differently.

Denn schonend rührt des Maases allzeit kundig
Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen
Ein Gott an, unversehn, und keiner weiß es, wenn?
Auch darf alsdann das Freche drüber gehn,
Und kommen muß zum heiligen Ort das Wilde
Von Enden fern, übt rauhbetastend den Wahn,
Und trifft daran ein Schicksaal, aber Dank,
Nie folgt der gleich hernach dem gottgegebenen Geschenke;
Tiefprüfend ist es zu fassen.
(MA 1: 363)

Hölderlin describes something much simpler than Schleiermacher’s birth of the religious image. God “rührt...Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen” (analogous to Schleiermacher’s “mysterious” fleeting moment), and the power of this touch lingers *without* being resolved into a “thingly” form. Instead, it becomes a “Schicksaal,” an *invisible* religious reality that has an inscrutable influence on us. Only by thinking deeply (“tiefprüfund”) can *Schicksal* be translated into form. Such deep thought, however,

cannot be carried out in a single sunny afternoon, as in Schleiermacher; it requires all of history—from the pre-civilized “Wilde” to the “tiefprüfend” thinkers of Hölderlin’s own day—to bring it about. It is the task of the poet to grasp (“zu fassen”) the god-given gift. It is an ongoing, perhaps interminable, labor.

In “Friedensfeier” the poet is talking about the “normal” human subject, i.e., the one who progresses historically from the “Wilde” to the “tiefprüfend” philosopher. Punctuating the history of “normal” subjectivity, however, are prophetic geniuses, like the eponymous subject of the ode “Rousseau,” and Hölderlin also reflects on their relation to the divine. Instead of mindlessly colliding with *Schicksal*, as do “das Freche” and “das Wilde,” or turning his intellectual powers loose on it, as does the “deep thinking” philosopher, the prophet attempts to view *Schicksal* by rising *above* history. Such an individual is favored by the gods and in a rare moment

....siehet über die eigne Zeit,
Ihm zeigt ein Gott ins Freie.
(StA 2,1: 12)

From the bird’s eye view of the prophet, the mystery of *Schicksal* appears merely as a blank page: “das Freie.” Although “das Freie” sounds like something positive—it takes “freedom,” after all, to operate as a moral being—its formlessness renders it epistemologically worthless. It might as well be “das Nichts.” “Das Freie” gives the poet nothing that can be shared or implemented once he descends from his visionary altitude. Consequently, the prophet finds himself disappointed and estranged—doubly so—upon descending from “das Freie” into the human world:

...doch sehrend stehst
Am Ufer du, ein Ärgernis den
Deinen, ein Schatten, und liebst sie nimmer,

Und jene, die du nennst, die Verheißenen,
Wo sind die Neuen, daß du an Freundeshand
Erwarmst, wo nahn sie, daß du einmal,
Einsame Rede, vernehmlich seiest?

Klanglos ists, armer Mann, in der Halle dir,
Und gleich den Unbegrabenen irrest du
Unstät und suchest Ruh...
(StA 2,1: 12)

The Rousseau-figure is estranged from his fellow men, amongst whom he moves as a “shadow,” and he is also estranged from the gods, who do not compensate him for his loss. The “Verheißenen”—the beings populating the prophet’s religious vision—are just as shadowy as the prophet himself has become. The attempt to see the divine has failed, because the divine is not the kind of thing can be seen. It has no “thingly” qualities. It is only—at least to human eyes—“das Freie.” The “Verheißenen” never materialize because no such “thing” was ever really promised (*verheißen*): the “armer Mann” promised them *to himself*.

In both “Friedensfeier” and the “Rousseau,” language gestures towards a formalization (e.g. an image, a definition) of the divine, but in the end this formalization fails. In the first poem the poet works from “below” or “within,” while in the second he works from “above,” and between the two perspectives we come to understand that the divine is not something to be “seen” from *any* perspective. It is more like time, which is lived, than space, which is seen. We know it as a *Schicksal* guiding us mysteriously *through* time, rather than an image of life fixed somewhere *outside* of time. Truth is not the formal object of Platonic vision, but the lived quality of a sacred experience, as we will discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Instead of giving us “eyes to see,” the “touch” of God confronts us with our religious blindness. This blindness should be compared to Schleiermacher’s “highest flowering of religion,” which is a *vision* of the “image of the universe...the beloved and ever-sought-for form.” Hölderlin categorically rejects the translation of a divine event into a divine form, while Schleiermacher lingers on the illusion that such a translation is possible. I say “illusion” because Schleiermacher makes it clear that the contact with the divine (the “caress,” “kiss,” “embrace,” etc.) is *severed* in order to produce the divine form. The divine form lives parasitically off the afterglow of the divine perception. Because this afterglow inevitably fades, religion must continually be reborn, as Schleiermacher argues later on in the *Speeches*. Perhaps the greater “purist,” Hölderlin never swaps the “blind,” physical language of originary revelation (*rühren, bewegen, ergreifen, treffen*, etc.) for the visual-conceptual language of theology (Schleiermacher’s “image of the universe”). Privileging the physical has its advantages and disadvantages: it heightens the sense of divine immediacy, but it also confounds the understanding.

To give an example, Hölderlin would never translate this:

Drum sandt er ihnen
Den Geist, und freilich bebte
Das Haus und die Wetter Gottes rollten
Ferndonnernd über
Die ahnenden Häupter, da, schwersinnend,
Versammelt waren die Todeshelden,

Itzt, da er scheidend
Noch einmal ihnen erschien.
 (“Patmos,” StA 2,1: 168)

into this:

die ursprüngliche Anschauung des Christenthums...ist keine andere als die des allgemeinen Entgegenstrebens alles Endlichen gegen die Einheit des Ganzen, und der Art wie die Gottheit dieses Entgegenstreben behandelt, wie sie die Feindschaft

gegen sich vermittelt, und der größer werdenden Entfernung Grenzen setzt durch einzelne Punkte über das Ganze ausgestreut, welche zugleich Endliches und Unendliches, zugleich Menschliches und Göttliches sind.
(*Reden*, 316)

The difference is not so much one of poetry and prose, or “art” and “theory,” as much as experience and thought. Both passages are dealing with the mystery of Christ. In the lines from “Patmos,” Hölderlin describes the physical trauma of the Pentecost (displaced onto the scene of Christ’s first resurrected appearance to his disciples), while Schleiermacher describes “die geliebte und immer gesuchte [conceptual] Gestalt” that is *extracted* from this cosmic event. Hölderlin refuses to swap out sacred fire for sacred form, because he fails to see the warrant for such an exchange. When the poet does reflect on his experience, he does not come up with a conceptual “image of the universe” like Schleiermacher. Rather, he stumbles on his own blindness: “Was ist dies?” Hölderlin celebrates no creeds, for all formalizations of the divine come at the expense of the thing—or rather the event—itself.

The Divine Touch

In the first part of this chapter we have looked at the role of the body in the representation of religious reality. In every case, divine communication is unthinkable except through physical means. This physicality of the divine produces a paradox, which we can observe in Fichte, Schleiermacher, and Hölderlin: the material revelation of God simultaneously gives *and* withholds God from us. Precisely because the divine first appears in a physical (or physical-like) event, “spirit” cannot commune directly with “spirit,” i.e., God and the

soul cannot become two moments of the same spiritual reality, as in Hegel. The *deus revelatus* thus constitutes the *deus absconditus*.

What we can never see with the eye of understanding can nevertheless leave its *imprint* on representation. Hölderlin's poetry is, as Rainer Nägele puts it, an "Echoraum," in which the poet's speech "nicht Schöpfung und Zeugen ist, sondern Zeugnis dessen, was er vernommen hat" (*Kritik* 26-27). Poetry is relieved of the "symbolic" task of participating in divine reality,¹³ and instead just has to pass along what it has observed. Poetry comes just after the fact, and its God is the God of Moses: "I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen" (Ex. 33:22-23). Poetry's "experience" is God passing by—or *having* passed by—and it offers up the marks of this passage.

We have established that the marks of the divine passage are physical and affective. The physical marks attest to the reality of the divine, while the affective ones give us limited knowledge about the divine character (e.g. God is good). In the remainder of this chapter we will look at both kinds in more detail starting with the physical.

We saw in "Friedensfeier" how tactile or kinetic imagery is intimately involved in the representation of the divine (*röten die Wangen, halten, aufhalten*). There are many more examples throughout Hölderlin's work (all italics are mine):

...und nicht geweissagt war es, sondern
Die Locken ergriff es, gegenwärtig

Aber der Mut von ihnen ist groß, es *füllen das Herz* ihm
Ihre Freuden...

¹³ Goethe, most notably, described the symbol as a sign participating in—rather than arbitrarily standing in for—the reality being signified. See Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, Blackwell, 1982.

So *bewegt* sie die Welt und die hoffende Seele der Menschen,

Nur zu Zeiten *erträgt* göttliche Fülle der Mensch.

...so auch
Treiben uns lächelnd hinaus die Götter.

Doch lebts in ihm und gegenwärtig,
Wärmend und wirkend, die *Frucht entquillt* ihm.

Und schon Jahre genug leb ich in sterblicher
Unverständiger Liebe
Zweifelnd, immer *bewegt* vor ihm,

Zu mächtig, ach! ihr himmlischen Höhen, *zieht*
Ihr mich empor, bei Stürmen, am heitern Tag
Fühl ich verzehrend euch *im Busen*
Wechseln, ihr wandelnden Götterkräfte.

Wo wunderbar zuerst, als du die
Locken ergriffen, und unvergesslich

Der unverhoffte Genius über uns
Der schöpferische, göttliche kam, daß stumm
Der Sinn uns ward und, wie vom
Strahle gerührt, *das Gebein erbebe*...

...es sorget mit Gaben
Selber ein Gott für ihn, *kennet und sieht er es nicht*.

Tragen muß er, zuvor

Denn schonend *rührt* des Maßes allzeit kundig
Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen
Ein Gott an, unversehn, und keiner weiß es, wenn?

I do not want to give the false impression that *most* of the language used to describe encounters with the divine in Hölderlin is tactile or kinetic. Without having examined the matter statistically, I would say that Hölderlin draws on the tactile, the aural, and the visual in roughly equal measure. Sometimes it is hard to isolate a single governing sense. However, the tactile references are important because they are most able to stand alone without confirmation from the other senses, or even in contradiction to the other senses. In the list above, the last two passages are good examples of tactile primacy. In the second to last example, we feel the weight (*tragen*) of the divine before we can see and know it (*sehen* and *kennen*). In the last example, we are “touched” (*gerührt*) by the divine without even knowing so much as “when” or “if” (*wenn*) it happened, a strange paradox to which we will return in the next chapter on religious temporalities. In any case, the tactile is clearly important to Hölderlin’s conception and representation of divine experience.

Why is this tendency toward the tactile significant for the representation of divine difference? To answer this question we must digress and discuss what tactility is not: vision.

“Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed”: Epistemology and Vision

In the eighteenth century, visuality and epistemology were tightly interconnected, since “seeing” seemed to offer the best access objective reality. The optical theory of the day understood vision by analogy to the *camera obscura*, a primitive photographic device with an aperture through which external images are reproduced on an inside wall.

Similarly, the eye was thought to take up particles from external objects and project them on the “wall” of the mind without essential modification.¹⁴ The eye is literally a window through which the world enters the mind. Vision has the most intimate relation to reality, since it seems to reproduce things transparently without interference from the visual organ. The eye is a self-effacing technology.

With this understanding of vision, it is not surprising that eighteenth-century epistemology would be built on visual metaphors. Epistemological criteria common at the time (and every bit as frequent today) generally privilege vision over the other senses: “clear,” “distinct,” “illuminating,” and “enlightening” all suggest a high truth-value. Christian Wolff, the philosophical systematizer who best represents the pre-critical, rationalist tradition of the 18th century, teaches that every idea (*Begriff*) can be categorized within a fixed hierarchy of binary judgments, the first and most important of which are entirely visual: *klar/dunkel*, *deutlich/undeutlich* (Wellbery, 12). Nonvisual descriptors like “touching,” “moving,” or “harmonious” play no role in Wolff’s epistemological vocabulary.

¹⁴ Jonathan Crary has written on the shift in the early 19th century away from the kind of optical science represented by the camera obscura to model of vision that takes into account the *modifications* made by the eyes and the brain to visual stimuli (represented by devices such as the phenakistiscope and stereoscope). See *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990).

Vision is not just involved in making epistemological judgments, however. The mental representations *constituting* knowledge are themselves a visual product. Since the object itself cannot enter our mind, it must be reconstructed or “represented” (*vorgestellt*) as a kind of picture in our head before we can claim knowledge of it. Abstract objects are represented in the same way, which means that “*all* mental activities...have their source in—are modifications of—the soul’s representational activity” (Wellbery 9). Wolff felt this was an uncomplicated process resembling the painting of a picture. Thus we not only “see” when we make judgments about the world, but we “see” in order to initiate the possibility of judgment, in order to create the object to be judged. The upshot of a representational epistemology is that the subject-object relation underlies *all* knowledge. Everything I know or can know is something (an object) that I (the subject) place before myself (the literal meaning of *vorstellen*), spatialize, and master with my gaze.

It is worth pointing out that many philosophers have been suspicious of the epistemological “gaze.” Heidegger, as Stephen Houlgate observes, disapproves of our modern age insofar as it “conceives of whatever is as something ‘placed before us’ (*vorgestellt*), as objective, that is, as something whose being lies in standing over against us—there—as an object (*Gegenstand*) which is present to us in all its clarity” (Levin, 91).¹⁵ Heidegger worries that the representational way of understanding the world—that all knowledge consists of images constructed by my mind and placed before me—is

¹⁵ The title of Houlgate’s essay in the volume edited by David Macheal Levin is “Vision, Reflection, and Openness: The ‘Hegemony of Vision’ from a Hegelian Point of View.” It should be noted that Houlgate finds the twentieth-century villainization of visibility unwarranted. In particular, his reading of Hegel sees vision as a reifying power which always, however, leads beyond its own reifications. The disagreement is not so much about the way vision works, but its use as a stopping point in the dialectic of thought. I would merely add the even if vision leads beyond itself, it still works in *terms* of visibility and reification, whereas Hölderlin’s distinctive use of tactility gestures toward something qualitatively different, a new *kind* of epistemological language.

becoming more and more entrenched as modern technologies allow us to manipulate *everything* as objects. By living in the world exclusively as manipulating subjects, we lose a sense of the simple mystery of coming-into-being, and forfeit a primary, constitutive experience of being for a secondary, instrumental one.

Coming from a different philosophical perspective, Bergson describes the travesty of representation in fairly similar terms:

As soon as we try to give an account of a conscious state, to analyze it, this state, which is above all personal, will be resolved into impersonal elements external to one another, each of which calls up the idea of a genus and is expressed by a word. But because our reason, equipped with the idea of space and the power of creating symbols, draws these multiple elements out of the whole, it does not follow that they were contained in it. For within the whole they did not occupy space and did not care to express themselves by means of symbols; they permeated and melted into one another. Associationism thus makes the mistake of constantly replacing the concrete phenomenon which takes place in the mind by the artificial reconstruction of it given by philosophy, and of thus confusing the explanation of the fact with the fact itself. (163)

For both Heidegger and Bergson, representing or “giving an account” of experience is a reductive spatialization process.

For our present purpose, it is also important to point out that visual epistemology eventually contradicts a theology of transcendence. The “putting before” of representation is inherently repressive. The metaphor of “putting” something in front of us inevitably suggests that we are in the position of power. We are capable of seizing and restraining the object’s essence in order to take it in as knowledge. This is simply incompatible with the tradition view of God. Any God that we can seize and restrain is no longer the inscrutable transcendent being of orthodox theology.

This danger is not merely potential. Representationalism seriously undermines theology in the eighteenth century, but not in the way one might expect. The problem is

not that overweening philosophers start manhandling God, “putting him before them” to master him with their epistemological gaze. Rather, philosophers exclude God from their labors in first philosophy *because* he is only representation. Like all other representations, God emerges in our mind from more basic principles. Consequently, juggling representations—even sacred ones—is not the road to truth, which can only lie in the transcendental (not transcendent) operations of the mind.

We get a concrete example of how representationalism impacts religion in Schelling’s 1795 text *Vom Ich*. For Schelling, consciousness not only must represent things to itself, but it must invest those things with being (*Sein*), since only the representing subject has being in itself. Such an *Ich-Philosophie* moves beyond representational epistemology to representational ontology. Knowledge no longer consists of real things generating mental images, as in Wolff, but rather the imaging mind generating real things. God is one such thing. While I am free to assert that God reveals himself to me, I must also acknowledge that it is I who invest God—and everything else—with being.

This is obviously problematic for religion. The problem is not so much that God could not exist independently of the *Ich*; rather, the problem is that an independent God could not find room to dwell in us alongside the oversized ego. Jesus describes the Holy Ghost as the “Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you [i.e., he is *coincident* with the self].” This blurring of the line between self and God is not possible for Schelling, who says that the self is epistemologically and ontologically *prior* to God. It strains logic (for Schelling) to say that God is active in us before we have even

brought him into existence. What is our justification for retrofitting the subject with a second divine self, a cohabitor of the soul who is not immediately given in our representation of self? The doctrine of the God “abiding” in us seems arbitrary at best.

This incompatibility between representationalism and theology makes it clear why Hölderlin would want to explore a non-visual, non-representational kind of religious rhetoric. Representationalism leads to the idea that whatever can be known can be known *clearly*. If it is not clear, it has no being (as least for the early Schelling).

Representationalism has little patience for things that are intrinsically unrepresentable, such as the inscrutable God, especially if this God is seen as the source of reality! If we take Schelling as the background for Hölderlin’s religious thought, we can see why the poet would be compelled to cling to the “divine” (a *quality* of experience) rather than to “God” (a representation). Once “God” enters the picture, philosophy can dispatch him. This need to “hide” God from philosophy also explains Hölderlin’s preference for neuter nominalized adjectives (*das Höchste, das Beste, das Erfruende*), plural divinities (*die Himmlischen, die Seligsten, die Guten*), and a general inconsistency in divine nomenclature (*Gott, ein Gott, die Götter, Halbgötter, das Göttliche*, etc.).

Divine Kinesis

Vision is not always luminous. Because it puts us in relation to an external world, vision always enacts the distinction between subject and object, and the subject-object distinction in turn creates a space, as Kant demonstrated, for a “thing-in-itself” impenetrable to sight. Vision, in other words, may produce knowledge that is *klar* and

deutlich, but this same clarity *also* erects an epistemological wall between the one seeing and the thing seen. It reveals *and* veils. One might ask if there is a non-visual register of experience in which the problem of the “in-itself” never emerges. Hölderlin, I suggest, finds this alternative in tactility.

Touch is opaque and produces knowledge that is relatively *dunkel* and *undeutlich*. Its manner of relating the internal and external world is oblique, since the *skin* (unlike eyes, ears, mouth, or nose) is not an *orifice*, such as would allow us to construct an epistemological metaphor of direct intake. Skin is the primal barrier between self and world, inside and out; a breach in the skin is not an orifice but a wound. Unlike the eye, the flesh translates the object into a *mediate* form (i.e., pressure or pain) in order to produce sensation. It is nothing like the seemingly self-effacing medium of the eye.

Describing touch in this way seems to hold little epistemological promise, but a rhetoric of tactility has one religiously useful consequence; it opens up the interior of the body as a whole new site of experience. Although most things we can touch we can also see, the interior of the body is a space of utter darkness, where only tactile sensation is possible. Of course, anatomy opens the interior of the body to vision as well, and when I feel my heart beating, I (having learned anatomy) can also “see” the physical organ in my mind’s eye. But not all internal processes can be reduced to anatomy or physiology, since they include a mental or spiritual component. The “heart” captures this ambiguity perfectly: is it a metaphor of spirit, a synecdoche for the body, or both? Some internal events may be *mostly* spiritual with only a *trace* of the physical, or vice versa.

In any case, inner experience obscures the boundary between the representing subject and the represented object. The human interior is of part of “me,” but it is not the

thinking part of me. Nor is it merely my body, which I can think of as detached from my self. Phenomenologically this creates an interesting situation. If the visual-representational distinction of subject and object does not obtain in inner (tactile) experience, then what remains is pure feeling. This feeling will initially appear in consciousness as something physical, which will allow the subject to distinguish itself from the feeling. But there will also be something intimate and spiritual about the feeling, which will prevent the subject from classifying it with other external stimuli. This inner realm that does not belong to my thinking self could well be called “spirit,” and it is frequently where we look for religious knowledge.

Another important phenomenological point is that in the absence of an object around which to coalesce, interior events will be experienced primarily as a stirring or elation. This is Otto’s divine *Energisches*. Because this stirring sits at the threshold between the physical and the intellectual, it is possible for representations to *emerge* from it (as opposed to capturing it). This is what happens when, for instance, Hölderlin associates terms like “hope,” “gratitude,” and “love” with the “touch” of the gods. Whatever that “touch” may actually be in itself, it is intrinsically suggestive of a mysterious benevolence. This quality of the experience is what justifies the attribution of the “touch” to the gods in the first place.

The object-less stirring of the divine “touch” can be captured in the term “kinesis.” The OED defines kinesis as “an *undirected* movement of an organism that occurs in response to a *particular* kind of stimulus” (my emphasis). Used mostly in reference to microbotic life, the “particular” kind of stimulus in question is tactile rather than visual. As an undirected burst of movement unleashed by a particular, tactile

stimulus, kinesis is quite different from romanticism's favored biological model: organicism. There is no driving inner form in kinesis, but only a transient tactile force like the Johannine wind "blow[ing] where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." Kinesis can be thought of as the prolongation of touch, the *energy* that flows out from touch and stimulates thought and action. This perplexing arousal of spirit is what we find again and again when tactile verbs like *treffen*, *bewegen*, *rühren*, *treiben*, *tragen*, *füllen*, *schüttern*, *ergreifen*, *erwecken*, and so forth. The divine "touch" releases a kinetic force that drives and disorders history, and this creative disorder becomes the signature of the divine.

Before giving positive examples of the "undirected movement" of the kinetic divine in Hölderlin's poetry, let begin with the *negative* example of Wordsworthian pantheism. In "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," the divine manifests itself as an inner movement ("a motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things), but this movement is neither undirected nor unrepresentable. In the scene before him, the poet senses

...something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of thought
And rolls through all things.¹⁶

Wordsworth's "motion...that impels / All thinking things...And rolls through all things" is superficially similar to Hölderlin's *Bewegung* that stirs the world and the "hoffende Seele der Menschen" in "Brod und Wein." However, Wordsworth claims that this motion

¹⁶ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 115.

“dwells” in nature and the “mind of man.” It is “interfused” and essentially indistinguishable from them. Coleridge calls this divinity the “one life within us and abroad,” and the “intellectual breeze, / At once the soul of each, and God of All.” In a similar vein, Herder speaks of God as the “Urkraft aller Kräfte,” the selfsame power that animates both mind and nature. These writers’ pantheistic interpretation of the divine movement prevents it from signifying anything new or different from the world we already know. The inner stage of feeling becomes a mirror of mind and nature rather than an alternative to them.

Hölderlin does not actually believe that God, mind, and nature form a single spiritual whole. God and nature frequently seem to converge, but man is never part of this equation.¹⁷ When God penetrates the interior of man, the result is confusion and even distress. We don’t know why the divine comes and goes, or where it leads us. In its kinetic relation to man, the divine is decidedly “unnatural.”

All of this is apparent in the ode “Mein Eigentum.” The first stanzas present us with a pantheistic mood that is disrupted in the fourth stanza by the poet’s awareness of his spiritual exclusion.

In seiner Fülle ruhet der Herbsttage nun,
Geläutert ist die Traub und der Hain ist rot
Vom Obst, wenn schon der holden Blüten
Manche der Erde zum Danke fielen.

Und rings im Felde, wo ich den Pfad hinaus,
Den stillen, wandle, ist den Zufriedenen
Ihr Gut gereift und viel der frohen
Mühe gewähret der Reichtum ihnen.

¹⁷ This is the central theme of Hölderlin’s epistolary novel *Hyperion*, where human nature is distinguished by an infinite desire for intellectual, artistic, and political beauty. This drives man out of the pantheistic union between spirit and nature, and makes him dependent on a vaguely theistic *Schicksal*, which can look favorably on us, but can also cast us “ins Ungewisse hinaus” (StA 3: 118).

Vom Himmel blicket zu den Geschäftigen
Durch ihre Bäume milde das Licht herab,
Die Freude teilend, denn es wuchs durch
Hände der Menschen allein die Frucht nicht.

Und leuchtest du, o Goldenes, auch mir, und wehst
Auch du mir wieder, Lüftchen, als segnetest
Du eine Freude mir, wie einst, und
Irrst, wie um Glückliche, mir am Busen?
(StA 1,1: 306)

Nature appears saturated with the divine: “in seiner Fülle ruhet der Herbsttage nun.” It has been clarified (“geläutert”) by a more-than-natural *Licht* (l.10), or *Goldenes* (l.13), which is also the source of joy (*Freude*, lines 11 & 15) for *certain* classes of people. It is crucial to understand that Hölderlin—just like Wordsworth—tends to treat the rural lower class like children or objects of nature rather than like free rational subjects. They can live in unity with nature—and through nature with the divine—because they are not yet human. The self-reflective subject of the fourth stanza has left this pre-human condition behind.

Even so, the third stanza gives us a hint of human isolation even among the simple class of men. We read that the light distributes joy (“die Freude teilend”), but “teilen” is just as divisive as it is unifying. Sharing is not merging “rolling through all things”; it implies an ontological separation between the divine giver and the human receiver, which requires them to interact as free persons rather than organically connected parts.¹⁸ Accordingly, joy must be given as a gift, in this case the *Frucht* (l.15) that “wuchs durch Hände der Menschen allein...nicht.“

¹⁸ There is an ambiguity in the phrase “die Freude teilend.” In my interpretation, I assume that “das Licht” shares *out* the “Freude” with the “Geschäftigen.” It is also possible that the Licht shares *in* the “Freude.” The former is more likely, however, since “Freude” often functions as a gift in Hölderlin’s poetry. Also, in the fourth stanza it is clear that the “Goldenes” is in a position to bestow “Freude” on the poet, which

Only in the fourth stanza do we see man fully cut out of the pantheistic economy. The poet can address the divine by name (in the Trinitarian guise of “Goldenes,” “Lüftchen,” and “Freude”) only because he has separated from it. As “Lüftchen,” the divine is like the Johannine wind, which “blows” (*wehen*) over us without resting upon us. It must pass over us or it will cease to exist. Most importantly, the precise *way* in which the divine “Freude” infiltrates the human subject is very telling. The divine does not “dwell” in us, as in the Gospel of John or in Wordsworth, but rather consecrates a joy *for* us (“segnetest / Du eine Freude *mir*”). The dative pronoun (*mir*) and the verb “segnen” establish an interpersonal distance between the human and the divine, which is at odds with pantheistic identity. If the divine does not merge with self, it must employ an intermediary, which is what we get in “Freude”: “segnetest du *eine Freude* mir.” The divine is the second person “Du,” while the “Freude” is a third-person go-between. Just as telling in the fourth stanza is the verb “irren” in the last line, which evokes an image diametrically opposed to the “dwelling” Spirit of Hegel, Wordsworth, and John 14 (but in harmony with John 3). The space necessary for *irren* is simultaneously the space separating the human and the divine. It is the space that explains why the divine is “*um* Glückliche” rather than “*in* Glücklichen,” and “*am* Busen” rather than “*im* Busen.” These positions of nearness never lead to penetration and unification. The divine remains an ambient and ambulatory power, at once intimate and alien.

This alienation-within-intimacy comes to the fore in the seventh stanza, as we saw in the previous chapter. After being caught up in the divinely “interfused” scene of the opening stanzas, the poet reflects on his own “uprootedness”:

suggests that the “Licht” in the third stanza would be doing the same, i.e., sharing *out* and not sharing *in* “Freude.”

Denn, wie die Pflanze, wurzelt auf eignem Grund
Sie nicht, verglüht die Seele des Sterblichen,
Der mit dem Tageslichte nur, ein
Armer, auf heiliger Erde wandelt.
(StA 1,1: 307)

The earth is holy, but the poet is not; he is “poor” (*arm*) and “mortal” (*sterblich*). The earth is *not* the “eigener Grund” of the “Seele des Sterblichen.” Nature’s glory is its own, and while man can admire and cultivate nature, he remains alien to it. Against the steady backdrop of the “heiliger Erde,” man is a melancholy “fading away” (*verglühen*) into the night of death. Confronted with the “saturated phenomenon”¹⁹ of an autumnal harvest, the poet indeed feels the divine “impelling all thinking things,” as Wordsworth says, but this pressure is *not centripetal*; it does not pull the human spirit and nature into a common organic whole. On the contrary:

Zu mächtig, ach! ihr himmlischen Höhen, zieht
Ihr mich empor, bei Stürmen, am heitern Tag
Fühl ich verzehrend euch im Busen
Wechseln, ihr wandelnden Götterkräfte.
(StA 1,1: 307)

Here, at last, we encounter the divine kinesis for which the preceding stanzas set the sage. The “himmlische Höhe” are “im Busen,” but this is an unstable and discordant condition. The seamless image of the divine “rolling through all things”—including the poet—in the Wordsworthian idyll contrasts sharply with the clash between the poet and the divine in Hölderlin. What the Hölderlinian poet sees—the serene fullness of nature—and what he feels—the “consuming alternation” (“verzehrend...Wechseln”) of “roaming” divine powers (“wandelnden Götterkräfte”) in the poet’s bosom—are *heterogeneous* manifestations of the divine. The kinetic violence inside the poet’s body (“im Busen”)

¹⁹ This is a key term in Jean-Luc Marion’s religiously-mindful phenomenology. See, for instance, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena* (New York: Fordham UP, 2004).

does not institute any kind of wholeness or completion comparable to what we find in nature.

The *irren* of the divine *am Busen* is gentle enough, but *im Busen* it becomes “zu mächtig” and “verzehrend.” This violence is made more extreme by its apparent lack of purpose, which is the “undirectedness” of the kinetic. Because the subject cannot see whence, whereby, or whereto it is being moved upon, it can perceive the divine as a burden, or even a threat, as the divine “settles” in the subjective interior.

But have we contradicted ourselves? Can the divine—contrary to our conclusions in the last chapter—“settle into the subjective interior” after all? At the beginning of “Mein Eigentum” the divine is still exterior to the poet, but in the stanza above (“Zu mächtig, ach!...”) the divine has entered the paradigmatic interior space: the *Busen*. Of course this interiorization does not work very well. The divine tears mercilessly at the flesh in which it has been caged. Nevertheless, the poet has at least made an attempt to think about the divine as something *im Busen* rather than *am Busen*.

I believe that this attempt at interiorizing the divine is more typical of the early poetry. (“Mein Eigentum” is an earlier ode.) Peter Szondi proposes that the earlier poetry (e.g. the elegies) is characterized by a pained desire for personal reconciliation with the divine, while the later poetry (e.g. the “hymns” or *vaterländische Gesänge*) tends to obliterate the self in disinterested praise of the gods. In the early *Erlebnislyrik*, the poet suffers “das Gefühl von Finsternis, von Götterferne, von Liebelosigkeit [und] die Erfahrung der Vereinzelung” (50), and he *nurses* these. His suffering is ultimately self-willed. The only solution is to abandon the entire cause of the self. “Das Elegische

mündet nicht eigentlich in das Hymnische, ein qualitativer Sprung trennt die beiden Formen: der von der Erlebnislyrik zum selbstlosen Preis der Götter” (54).

On one level I think Szondi is wrong, since subjective elements of *Erlebnis* never disappear from Hölderlin’s poetry. The *feel* of the personal encounter remains important. At the same time, Szondi is right to identify an elegiac tendency in the earlier poetry accompanying the poet’s attempts to capture and restrain the divine *for himself*. In the more mature poetry, the poet is less anxious about capturing the divine, and more prepared to calmly reflect on its fleeting appearances and the intervening absences. He finally understands that the divine is kinetic rather than organic.

One way to read the poetic development of Hölderlin’s oeuvre is in terms of an increased acceptance of divine kinesis over and against the more comprehensive and comprehensible model of organic pantheism. This gradual acceptance of the kinetic has a superficial similarity to the religious capitulation that Eric Santner identifies in Hölderlin’s late work. For Santner, it is “as if it had suddenly become safe for the poet to let go his breath and be there, with the things of the world; the anxieties associated with the stranded objects and shards of the narrative of redemption begin to be modulated into the consolations of the *Tageszeichen*” (126). The poet, in other words, is not so worried about the big picture, and how—or if—a grand reconciliation between God and man is to take place. The poet’s task, for Santner, is “no longer...to transcend the flux of time, but rather, in a peculiar sense to let us feel it more deeply, more fully, more caringly, and perhaps, even, to celebrate it” (136). I think Santner is right to point to a reduction of anxiety in some of the later poems (or at least parts of the poems). An image of quiet,

resigned contemplation is beautifully captured, for example, in the very late, final draft of “Mnemosyne”:

Vorwärts aber und rückwärts wollen wir
Nicht sehn. Uns wiegen lassen, wie
Auf schwankem Kahne der See.
(StA 2,1: 197)

The poet is not always trying to “get” somewhere in this “schwankem Kahne.” Yet the opening lines of another late poem suggest that the poet has *not* outgrown his religious ambition, nor has the world quieted down, as Santner suggests, into a gentle

“consolation”:

Jetzt komme, Feuer!
Begierig sind wir,
Zu schauen den Tag,
Und wenn die Prüfung
Ist durch die Knie gegangen
Mag einer spüren das Waldgeschrei.
(“Der Ister,” StA 2,1: 190)

Hölderlin never denies the “fire” of the divine and the power of its voice (“Waldgeschrei”). The poet merely comes to accept a *hiatus* between heaven and earth. Modernity finds itself in this hiatus and is powerless to close it. To sit in the *schwankem Kahne* is not, as Santner suggests, to forget the gods in quiet “celebration” of the world, but rather to relax our pursuit of the gods in acknowledgment of our religious impotence.

Nowhere is this transition from anxiety to resigned acceptance of divine kinesis better captured than in the following sequence from the late poem “Patmos,” where Christ’s anguished disciples are watching his final ascent into heaven:

...und nicht geweissagt war es, sondern
Die Loken ergriff es, gegenwärtig,
Wenn ihnen plötzlich
Ferneilend zurück blikte
Der Gott und schwörend,

Damit er halte, wie an Seilen golden
Gebunden hinfort
Das Böse nennend, sie die Hände sich reichten –

Wenn aber stirbt alsdenn
An dem am meisten
Die Schönheit hieng...

...wenn die Ehre
Des Halbgotts und der Seinen
Verweht und selber sein Angesicht
Der Höchste wendet
Darob, daß nirgend ein
Unsterbliches mehr am Himmel zu sehn ist oder
Auf grüner Erde, was ist diß?

Es ist der Wurf des Säemanns, wenn er faßt
Mit der Schaufel den Waizen,
Und wirft, dem Klaren zu, ihn schwingend über die Tenne.
Ihm fällt die Schaale vor den Füßen, aber
Ans Ende kommet das Korn,
Und nicht ein Übel ists, wenn einiges
Verloren gehet und von der Rede
Verhallet der lebendige Laut,
Denn göttliches Werk auch gleicht dem unsern.
Nicht alles will der Höchste zumal.
(StA 2,1: 169-170)

In the first stanza we have an extraordinary kinetic encounter with the divine as it “seizes” the lonely disciples “by the locks.” This experience was not predicted (*geweissagt*), because that would entail a kind of representability—specifically a foreseeability—uncharacteristic of the divine. Like the poet in certain early poems, the disciples here want to restrain the divine—“damit er halte...sie die Hände sich reichten”—within the field of history. In its most extreme version, this immature compulsion to grab hold of and restrain the divine leads to self-sacrifice, as in the odes “An die Parzen,” “Empedokles,” and “Stimme des Volkes” (second version) respectively:

Nur einen Sommer gönnt, ihr Gewaltigen!
Und einen Herbst zu reifem Gesange mir,

Daß williger mein Herz, vom süßen
Spiele gesättiget, dann mir sterbe.
(StA 1,1: 241)

Das Leben suchst du, suchst, und es quillt und glänzt
Ein göttlich Feuer tief aus der Erde dir,
Und du in schauerndem Verlangen
Wirfst dich hinab, in des Aetna Flammen.
(StA 1,1: 240)

Denn selbstvergessen, allzubereit, den Wunsch
Der Götter zu erfüllen, ergreift zu gern,
Was sterblich ist, wenn offenen Augs auf
Eigenen Pfaden es einmal wandelt,

Ins All zurück die kürzeste Bahn; so stürzt
Der Strom hinab, er suchet die Ruh, es reißt,
Es ziehet wider Willen ihn, von
Klippe zu Klippe, den Steuerlosen,

Das wunderbare Sehnen dem Abgrund zu;
Das Ungebundne reizet und Völker auch
Ergreift die Todeslust...
(StA 2,1: 51)

Like the apostles in “Patmos,” the subject in these other poems has been visited by the gods and dreads their withdrawal. Rather than learn to deal with the emptiness endemic in human existence, the subject clings to his gods through the self-sacrifice of death. The reason for this resort to death is suggested in “Stimme des Volkes,” where the subject, the “Steuerlosen,” wanders “auf eigenen Pfaden” in pursuit of “Das Ungebundne.” The subject pursues the source and telos of its religious desire in vain, since the divine is formless: “das Ungebundene.” Consequently, the poet must wander along “*eigenen Pfaden*” (not God’s ways), directionless (*steuerlos*) in its search for the divine. The kinetic nature of revelation does not provide us with a soteriological or eschatological blueprint, and so the religiously afflicted can only take one route: death. In Hölderlin,

death is not, as in Novalis, a kind of dissolution into the beloved, and thus a movement within a defined, conservative (albeit infinitely productive) system.²⁰ One of the striking things about Hölderlin's mature work is that it contains virtually no reference to an afterlife, not even a romantic re-absorption into the *Weltgeist*.²¹ This means that death does not mark any kind of teleological progress. Man is no closer to the gods through death, but only one step further from his present anguish. Death is sacred only as a gesture of self-sacrifice, a sign of readiness to follow the gods at all costs. Hölderlin never provides us with the metaphysics to justify the belief that death takes us anywhere.

As I said, death is an extreme and "immature" reaction to a hiatus in divine history. In "Patmos," the disciples "aber...liebten unter der Sonne / Das Leben und lassen wollten sie nicht / Vom Angesichte des Herrn / Und der Heimat." They have not yet understood and accepted the impermanence involved in divine kinesis, but they are not utterly desperate. The disciples are like the poet in the ode "Empedokles," who would like to follow Empedocles "in die Tiefe / Hielte die Liebe mich nicht" (StA 1,1: 240). They do not seek death because they are bound to the world by love. They would rather restrain God in this world than follow him into death. They are in danger of falling into despair or madness if they actually believe they *can* restrain the divine, but they have no

²⁰ I am thinking especially of the opening hymn of *Hymnen an die Nacht*, where the poet experiences the "night"—an image explicitly identified with death later in the work—as an erotic other: "liebliche Sonne der Nacht,—nun wache ich—denn ich bin Dein und Mein [...] zehre mit Geisterglut meinen Leib, daß ich luftig mit dir inniger mich mische und dann ewig die Brautnacht währt" (42).

²¹ It is important to distinguish between the early and late work here, since the novel *Hyperion* (published 1798 after six years of writing) contains some concentrated meditations on the afterlife, especially Diotima's deathbed letter to her beloved: "Wie sollt ich mich verlieren aus der Sphäre des Lebens, worin die ewige Liebe, die allen gemein ist, die Naturen alle zusammenhält?...nein! nein! im Bunde der Natur ist Treue kein Traum. Wir trennen uns nur, um inniger einig zu sein, göttlicher fridlich mit allem, mit uns. Wir sterben um zu leben" (StA 3: 148). This pantheistic immortality is markedly absent in the great elegies and "hymns" of the period 1800-1805.

choice (apart from death) other than to try. The disciples' hopeful yet hopeless action resembles the poet's prayer in "Mein Eigentum":

Ihr segnet gütig über den Sterblichen,
Ihr Himmelskräfte! jedem sein Eigentum,
O segnet meines auch, und daß zu
Frühe die Parze den Traum nicht ende.
(StA 1,1: 307)

The poet prays that the gods will linger in his song, but the prognosis is not good. The poet is aware of his own bad faith. He knows he is praying for something that will really only dull or forestall the pain of spiritual emptiness: "daß *zu* / Frühe die Parze den *Traum* nicht ende." The fleeting, kinetic nature of the divine is tacitly understood, but not really accepted.

In moving on to the second and third stanzas quoted above from "Patmos," we move beyond the disciples' reluctance to something more theologically realistic and spiritually courageous. The *mature* poet asks: when the God-man (Jesus) dies, the heavens are shut, and we can no longer even see a trace of the divine...*was ist dies?* Such an honest question was too much for the earlier poet. It was almost too much for the poet of "Hälfte des Lebens," who had the courage to stare divine absence in the face only to be robbed, in the end, of the power of speech: "Die Mauern stehn / Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde / Klirren die Fahnen." The concessions made in the question "was ist dies?" are too great. To acknowledge what theologians call "divine hiddenness"—the idea that God may really *not* be available—is silently to reject pantheism, panentheism, transubstantiation, and any other theology putting us in direct contact with the divine. The mature poet can let the *Griff* of the divine come and go, as it inevitably must. He has learned to relinquish his claim on God and take up the more impersonal task of

interpreting what has been left behind. By the end of “Patmos,” the poet has come to view the interpretation of remains as the very task of poetry (which is *not* the expressivist-idealist view of poetry found in the earlier theoretical writings):

...der Vater aber liebt,
Der über allen waltet,
Am meisten, daß gepflegt werde
Der feste Buchstab, und Bestehendes gut
Gedeutet. Dem folgt deutscher Gesang.
(StA 2,1: 172)

But what remains to be interpreted in the “Bestehendes”? As we saw in the passage quoted earlier, the *Bestehendes* is incomplete: “Nicht ein Übel ists, wenn einiges / Verloren gehet.” The “einiges” refers to some of the grain being threshed, and if God is the *Säemann* doing the threshing (which seems to me to be the case),²² the implication is that God is not watching over every sparrow that falls, or at least choosing not to intervene. Does this mean that God is not omnipotent? Or does it *precisely* mean that God is omnipotent, i.e., a being who is not bound by human expectations? In either case, God leaves behind an erratic trail that significantly challenges his interpreters. Hölderlin avoids the usual apologetic tendency to “leave nothing contingent in cosmic processes.”²³

“Einiges Verloren gehet” is Hölderlin’s way of saying that there is something irregular in the divine making it impossible to represent in any stable way. God has the freedom to change unexpectedly. Whatever trail God leaves behind in the world may not add up to any recognizable meaning. This, however, is not necessarily a bad thing. Any rational pattern that God did leave behind would probably end up replacing him.

²² The “Wurf des Säemanns” is extremely ambiguous, and has been called the “figure for the figure of figure(s)” (Warminski 488). Later in the stanza, however, the lines: “Denn göttliches Werk auch gleicht dem unsern, / Nicht alles will der Höchste zumal” suggest a fairly clear identification between the *Säemann* and *der Höchste*.

²³ Owen Gingerich, *God’s Universe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006), 115.

Hölderlin represents the divine as a kinetic, inner experience primarily, I believe, to deliver it from philosophical reduction.

The Fruit of the Spirit

We should now ask a final, crucial question: why does divine kinesis not lead to despair? If kinesis resists coherent form, how can it have any meaning for us? Why, if the divine does not join up with philosophy, does our faith in it not fail entirely? Whence the hope that resurfaces again and again in Hölderlin's poetry? I have suggested the answer to these questions at few points in this chapter and the preceding one, but the topic deserves specific treatment.

At the end of the last chapter I suggested that the divine is an encounter. Divine spirit and human spirit are not simply two moments in a single Hegelian Spirit, but really are *two* spirits (or a spirit and something else), and if we get nothing else from religious experience, we can at least take away the memory of two things having come together. What the current chapter adds to this story is a rhetorical strategy for capturing the *quality* of the divine encounter. As an "inner" event, the divine encounter is equidistant from a physical sensation and an intellectual movement. It produces a feeling that is both immediately real and immediately meaningful. It is both *treffen*, *ergreifen*, etc. and *Freude*, *Liebe*, *Dank*, and *Demut*. Having looked at the former aspect in the preceding section, I now want to spend a moment on the latter aspect.

There is no higher moment, perhaps, in Hölderlin's poetry than the simple statement near the end of "Heimkunft": "Törrig rede ich. Es ist die Freude" (StA 2,1: 98).

Criticism is more drawn to the lines just below, which allow us to forget the “uncritical” moment of *törige Freude* and see emotion as a mere accompaniment of language:

Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Namen,
Herzen schlagen und doch bleibt die Rede zurück?
(StA 2,1: 99)

A poststructural reading might see the desire to name (“es fehlen heilige Namen...doch bleibt die Rede zurück?”) as the direct cause of the “Herzen schlagen.” An intellectual anxiety about naming spills over into a physical anxiety.²⁴ Similarly, a Heideggerian reading might see the *schlagen* as a corollary to an intellectual anxiety about the hiddenness of Being. In his “Erläuterung” of “Heimkunft,” Heidegger asks the question: “Was ist die Freude?” to which he gives the answer: “Das ursprüngliche Wesen der Freude ist das Heimischwerden in der Nähe zum Ursprung” (25). “Joy” is indistinguishable from the ontological activity of *Dasein*, and this robs “joy” of any independent significance. In contrast, Hölderlin’s connection between joy and incoherence (“Törig rede ich. Es ist die Freude”) suggests that affect can be entirely different from linguistic or philosophical activity, and a fundamental experience requiring no theoretical accounting. *Schlagen* can precede *Rede* in every sense: temporally, causally, ontologically; it need not be reduced to an accompaniment, a mere “moment” in the process of language or in *Dasein*’s disclosure of Being.

The gift of God can be immediate affect. Paul says: “die Frucht aber des Geistes ist: Liebe, Freude, Friede, Geduld, Freundlichkeit, Gütigkeit, Glaube, Sanftmut,

²⁴ Rainer Nägele, for example, sees a physical dimension in God’s “striking” (*treffen*), but there is no question for him that the “real” meaning of the *treffen* is intellectual. It is the traumatic blow from the “Zeichen setzender Gott.” God is conceived as an essentially linguistic (“zeichen setzender”) rather than a physical force, and anything that comes from God will likewise be essentially linguistic. See *Text, Geschichte, und Subjektivität*, esp. pp. 17-120.

Keuschheit.” (Gal. 5:22, Luther translation). None of these is a synonym for knowledge.

Rather, the gift of God consists only of these emotions, which in some cases (*Liebe*,

Freundlichkeit, *Gütigkeit*, *Glaube*) have an ethical or interpersonal component. St.

Ignatius also describes the influence of God, or “consolation,” in terms of unmediated affect:

It is characteristic of God and His Angels, when they act upon the soul, to give true happiness and spiritual joy, and to banish all the sadness and disturbances which are caused by the enemy.... God alone can give consolation to the soul without any previous cause. It belongs solely to the Creator to come into a soul, to leave it, to act upon it, to draw it wholly to the love of His Divine Majesty.

Hölderlin’s poetry does not make sense without this unmediated uplift, and we must understand Hölderlin’s *Liebe* and *Freude* as relatives to those of Paul and Ignatius. They are not fruits of reason or even of beauty, but are *directly* divine. They are the other side, more beautiful side of divine kinesis. Because the two writers are on the same page, Ignatius’s recommendation of caution when reacting to the divine gift has relevance to the interpretation of Hölderlin:

When consolation is without previous cause, as was said, there can be no deception in it, since it can proceed from God our Lord only. But a spiritual person who has received such a consolation must consider it very attentively, and must cautiously distinguish the actual time of the consolation from the period which follows it. At such a time the soul is still fervent and favored with the grace and aftereffects of the consolation which has passed. In this second period the soul frequently forms various resolutions and plans which are not granted directly by God our Lord. They may come from our own reasoning on the relations of our concepts and on the consequences of our judgments, or they may come from the good or evil spirit. (119)

The “period” following the “actual time of consolation” is a period of potential error. As we move from a religious mode into a rational mode, we can easily misapply a divine good to a human problem. Theoretically, one might even argue that an “appropriate” application is impossible, since we are not dealing with compatible domains. In terms of

reading Hölderlin, this means that poetic reflection is almost certain to be inadequate to the task of representing and interpreting the divine gift to which the poetry is, at some level, a response. The poet understands this, and it explains the extraordinary, even excruciating, care he takes in pursuing his craft.

The doctrine and counsel of St. Ignatius are recast in a more philosophical idiom by Rudolf Otto:

Unser Gemüt kann etwa von einer tiefen Freude erfüllt sein ohne daß wir uns im Augenblick klar sind über den Grund des Freudegefühles oder über das Objekt auf das es sich bezieht. (Denn Freude ist immer Objekt-bezogen, ist immer Freude *über* etwas.) Grund oder Objekt der Freude ist uns dann zeitweilig dunkel. Richten wir aber unsere Aufmerksamkeit darauf, besinnen wir uns scharf darauf, so wird er uns klar... Ein solches Objekt werden wir dann nicht für ein Irrationales halten, obgleich es zeitweilig dunkel und nicht dem klaren Begreifen sondern nur dem Gefühl gegen war. Ganz anders aber ist es mit der Seligkeit über das Fascinans des Numinosen. Auch bei stärkster Spannung der Aufmerksamkeit gelingt es hier nicht, das Was und Wie des beseligenden Gegenstandes aus dem Dunkel des Gefühls in den Bereich begreifenden Verstehens zu bringen. Er bleibt im unauflöselichen Dunkel des rein gefühlsmäßigen unbegrifflichen Erfahrens, und nur durch die Notenschrift der deutenden Ideogramme ist er—nicht deutbar aber—andeutbar. (76)

The danger in reflecting on the divine is that the divine is irrational, and to understand it would be to mistake it and put something else in its place. The divine is at work in the world and “ruffles” the fabric of our immanent existence, but it is not part of this fabric and can therefore only be negatively, allegorically, or “ideogramatically” represented. At the same time, the Irrational is not unknown to us. On the contrary, we positively experience it as a “Seligkeit” moving in the intimate “Dunkel des rein gefühlsmäßigen...Erfahrens,” a “tiefe Freude” that fills our soul (*Gemüt*). We have to be careful to not intellectualize what is essentially affective.

The line between the rational and the irrational is admittedly very fine. What one person labels “unbegrifflich” might be—or *seem* to be—explained by someone else. In

our extremely scientific age, we are accustomed to thinking that there are only uncomprehended realities, never incomprehensible ones, and we feel it is our duty and privilege to eventually explain everything. This is certainly the ethos of the experimental sciences, and much of it can be found in the hermeneutic ones as well. For this reason, we have more of an ear for Hegel than Jacobi or Schleiermacher, who (Hegel tells us) stopped at the feeling of God, without grasping that every feeling is also a reflection. We have already seen how Hegel goes on to subordinate the physical dimension of the divine feeling to its intellectual dimension, thus purging God of anything that reflection cannot eventually bring to light. It is very easy to approach Hölderlin with a Hegelian confidence, since the poetry carries the form of philosophical reflection. There is no logical reason, however, why the rational form of Hölderlin's poetry cannot serve the *negative* purpose of isolating the irrational. There can, ironically, be a "rational irrationality," which protects feeling from reason's own intellectual encroachment, alongside the more familiar reason, which colonizes everything. Reason can be humble as well as proud. Otto tells us that once reason's pride has fallen before the Irrational, there is still a humble work for reason to do.

Zugleich stellt uns aber das Irrationale in diesem Sinne eine bestimmte Aufgabe: nämlich die, uns nicht mit seiner bloßen Feststellung zu beruhigen und nun dem Belieben und dem schwärmenden Gerede Tür und Tor zu öffnen sondern in möglichst nahe kommender ideogrammatishcher Bezeichnung seine Momente so fest zu legen wie möglich und auf diese Weise das was in schwankender Erscheinung bloßen Gefühles schwebte zu festigen mit dauernden "Zeichen," um so zu Eindeutigkeit und Allgemeingültigkeit der Erörterung zu kommen und "gesunde Lehre" zu bilden, die feste Fügung hat und objektive Gültigkeit erstrebt auch wenn sie statt mit adäquaten Begriffen nur mit Begriffs-symbolen arbeitet. (77)

With these words, Otto describes the nature of his own critical work, yet we should not overlook the extraordinary irony of this rationally irrational project. (Even to name it is

paradoxical.) Once reason is converted to the reality of the irrational, its job is scarcely different from what it was before. By analyzing the “Momente” of the divine carefully, irrational reason manages to isolate and fix the divine nature with “festigen und dauernden ‘Zeichen,’” which effectively gives the representation objective validity (“objektive Gültigkeit”). The only difference between a rationally irrational system and a merely rational one is that the first has a negative relation to its object, while the second names comprehends its object. In terms of functional accuracy, there is no difference.

I don’t think Hölderlin achieves the level of rational irrationality we find in Otto’s work, but I think he is undertaking something similar, even if he is not always conscious of the fact. In “Brod und Wein,” for example, the divine Irrational receives its “ideogrammatischer Bezeichnung” in the inexplicable optimism that fills the final lines of the poem despite the dismal reflection on history in the poem’s central stanzas. An even more poignant representation of the Irrational is the hope, built up from previous encounters with *das Energische*, which emerges from the dumbfounded silence between these lines in “Patmos”:

...was ist dies?

Es ist der Wurf des Säemanns...

The poet gives us the divine Irrational in a more subtle yet knowing way in the ode “An die Hoffnung” (the last stanza of which appears as an epigraph to this chapter). In this poem, “hope” has disappeared, and the poet reflects on the possibility of its retrieval.

O Hoffnung! holde! gütiggeschäftige!
Die du das Haus der Trauernden nicht verschmähst,
Und gerne dienend, Edle! zwischen
Sterblichen waltest und Himmelmächten,

Wo bist du? wenig lebt ich; doch atmet kalt
Mein Abend schon. Und stille, den Schatten gleich,
Bin ich schon hier; und schon gesanglos
Schlummert das schauernde Herz im Busen.

Im grünen Tale, dort, wo der frische Quell
Vom Berge täglich rauscht, und die liebliche
Zeitlose mir am Herbsttag aufblüht,
Dort, in der Stille, du Holde, will ich

Dich suchen, oder wenn in der Mitternacht
Das unsichtbare Leben im Haine wallt,
Und über mir die immerfrohen
Blumen, die blühenden Sterne, glänzen,

O du, des Aethers Tochter! erscheine dann
Aus deines Vaters Gärten, und darfst du nicht,
Ein Geist der Erde, kommen, schröck, o
Schröcke mit anderem nur das Herz mir.
(StA 2,1: 59)

After asking “wo bist du?” the poet instinctively turns for replenishment to nature, where “das unsichtbare Leben...wallt,” and where things are *grün, frisch, lieblich, blühend, still, immerfroh*, and *glänzend*. However, the mere presence of nature does not connect man to the divine in the deep way he is seeking. The poet remains an admiring observer of nature rather than an integrated part of it. The poet must go one step further, and plead to heaven for an infusion of hope: “O du des Aethers Tochter! erscheine dann / Aus deines Vaters Gärten...” He makes an appeal to something beyond the immanent sphere altogether, and the content of his appeal is curious:

...darfst du nicht,
Ein Geist der Erde, kommen, schröck, o
Schröcke mit anderem nur das Herz mir.

How are we to understand these commas? Is the poet appositively naming hope a *Geist der Erde*, or is he saying hope cannot come *as* a *Geist der Erde*? The latter makes more

sense in context, but the grammatical ambiguity already hints at the irrationality of the poem's transcendental referent. In either case, we don't know what the poet means by "Geist der Erde." Does Geist have a quasi-philosophical meaning here? Is it naming an intellectual reality? Or is it a supernatural reference? Does "Erde" point to nature (or Nature), or does it suggest immanence, as in the opposition *Himmel/Erde*? It is impossible to say, but maybe that is the point. Whatever particular meaning we give them, *Geist* and *Erde* are things we understand to some extent. They are familiar. The poet is suggesting, however, that the divine does not have a familiar form, and cannot be understood. It can accommodate itself to earthly forms, as in nature, but deep down it is a thing apart. Hence the poem's mysterious final plea: "schröck, o / Schröcke mit anderem nur das Herz mir." Hope must come as a sudden convulsion of the heart, precisely the kind of interior, kinetic event we have looked at in this chapter, although the verb *schröcken* adds an element of trauma to the experience. The theological moment of this plea comes in the phrase "mit anderem." If hope comes from nature, it is natural. If it comes from my own mind, it is intellectual. In either case, the divine risks becoming something immanent: matter or mind. There is a third way, however, going through the "heart" ("Schröcke mit anderem nur *das Herz* mir"), which is the seat of feeling, and a philosophical grey space between subjectivity and objectivity. The tangible shock (*schröcken*) of hope penetrating the dark interiority of the heart is a perfect rational representation of the Irrational, and a perfect image of the part physical, part affective experience of the divine event.

Chapter 4

“Keiner weiß es, wenn”: The Temporality of Divine Experience

Hölderlin’s poetry is full of divine encounters, but there are no eyewitness reports. One reason, as we saw in the last chapter, is that the eye—including the “mind’s eye” that represents or “sees” intelligible realities—is not the organ privileged by divine communication. Another reason is that Hölderlin’s God tends to reside in the past or the future. He reveals himself *now* as something that has *already* occurred or that is *still* to come, making us forever too early or too late. There is still a direct relation between God’s action and human experience, but the relation is now non-simultaneous. Indeed, the delay between divine cause and effect may span centuries.

The non-simultaneity of giving and receiving revelation is implicit in the by-now familiar lines from “Friedensfeier”:

Denn schonend rührt des Maßes allzeit kundig
Nur einen Augenblick die Wohnungen der Menschen
Ein Gott an, unversehn, und keiner weiß es, wenn?”
(MA 1: 363)

God touches the “dwellings of men” for “just a moment [*Augenblick*],” and yet no one can put a finger on this moment: “keiner weiß es, wenn?” Despite the etymology of *Augenblick*, the event never occurs in the visual present, a curious fact reiterated elsewhere in Hölderlin’s poetry: “unempfunden kommen sie [i.e., the gods] erst...So ist

der Mensch...es sorget mit Gaben / Selber ein Gott für ihn, *kennet und sieht er es nicht*" (my emphasis).

It is not the *Augen* that is important in the *Augenblick* of "Friedensfeier," but rather the *blicken*. Meaning "to glance" or "to gaze," *blicken* is an intransitive verb that acquires an object only through the mediation of a preposition like "auf." In other words, it marks the *intention* of vision rather than the product of vision, which is what the verb *sehen* points to. With *blicken*, something has captured our attention, but we do not yet know what it is. It is the activation of vision, the concentration of our focus in order to encompass something in the field of knowledge. It suggests the anticipation of knowledge rather than knowledge itself, and thus has a subtle *temporal* dimension. Somehow, it is in the duration of *blicken*—and I am invoking the Bergsonian meaning of "duration"¹—that religion happens, and not in the instantaneity of perception or *sehen*.

This contrast between *sehen* and *blicken* is related to the contrast David Levin makes between the reifying gaze and a vision that is "diffused, spacious, open, alive with awareness and receptive to the presencing of the field as a whole" (97). This latter sort of vision has a clear debt to Heidegger's critique of visibility and specifically to his concept of *Gelassenheit*, a way of perceiving in which the *how* of beings (the temporal process of their coming into being) is more important than the *what*.

This temporal de-centering or diffusion of the divine is economically expressed in the third stanza of "Brod und Wein," where the poet speaks of Greece, the place of spiritual origin:

¹ Bergson contrasts the felt quality of time, which he calls *durée*, to the spatialization of time as quantity. *Durée* is that register of experience where "states of consciousness, even when successive, permeate one another," and where we can "thus conceive of succession without distinction." See *Time and Free Will*, trans. F.L. Pogson, 3rd ed. (London: G. Allen, 1913), p. 98, 101.

Dorthier kommt und zurück deutet der kommende Gott.
(StA 2,1: 91)

Where in time is this “coming God”? The god points back to his origin before he has even arrived. In our experience of him, the coming god is not first known to us as a thing that *is* or *was*, but from the first moment as a thing *stretching toward or away* from us in time and space. Perhaps we, too, are stretching toward and away from ourselves in the divine moment. Perhaps there is a temporally “blurred” self corresponding to the temporal blurring of the divine.

Is the “stretching toward or away” of the divine like the foreshortening of memory? When I recall something out of my past experience and place it before my mind’s eye, the resulting perception distorts, in some degree, my sense of past and present. Is the “coming god” such a performance of memory? If by memory we mean recollection, then the answer is “no.” Although the god touches the “dwellings of men” in a particular *Augenblick*, we are told, the divine is not a mere recalling of this moment, since it was never clear which moment of consciousness corresponded to the divine touch (“keiner weiß es, wenn?”).² Instead of referring to the historical past, the divine carries the *mark* of anteriority. It does not recall a specific past event, even if there was (and continues to be) some such event. The god’s touch is always already a *fait accompli* whenever it knocks at the doors of consciousness:

Unempfunden kommen sie erst...
...kaum weiß zu sagen ein Halbgott,
Wer mit Namen sie sind, die mit den Gaben ihm nahn.

² Psychoanalysis gives one explanation of the divine event of which we were never conscious. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud explains religion’s “oceanic feeling” as the vestige of an infantile narcissism that once filled our consciousness completely (724-725). Although the quality of the divine in Hölderlin is different from Freud’s “oceanic feeling,” the idea of religious consciousness being pre-subjective is something they share, as will become clear in the next chapter.

(StA 2,1: 92)

The gods are already there before we feel them, and our feeling always includes the knowledge of this anteriority. We have missed them, and therefore cannot properly name them. The only thing we immediately encounter is the *gift* left behind. Such divine anteriority does not fit the paradigm of memory, which is a re-presentation of an old experience, a recycling and modification of something that *originally* occurred in the here-and-now form of the present. Hölderlin's God, however, *never* appears in the here and now, or more precisely: he does not present himself in the here-and-now *as* the here-and-now.

This last statement is crucial, albeit paradoxical. If the divine never presented itself in the here-and-now, it would be erroneous, or at most metaphorical, to speak of a divine "event" at all. Some postmodern theology accepts the pure metaphoricity of the "event," turning it into a phenomenological "disturbance" intrinsic to Being.³ But Hölderlin's poetry ceases to make sense (in my opinion) if we entirely remove the literal, historical dimension of the divine "touch." The mystery in Hölderlin's style of religious representation—one which I believe can be traced back to the historical tension between theology and philosophy—is the simultaneous presence of two apparently irreconcilable temporal forms: first, the historical "event," and second, the sense of anteriority or futurity, i.e., the sense that God is always already in the past or always still in the future. I will take up the significance of this paradox more thoroughly in the last section of this chapter.

³ I am thinking of the "weak theology" of John Caputo. See *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Indiana UP, 2006).

In the next two sections I want to limit myself to exploring the event character of the divine, which proves to be inconsistent and therefore unstable. The problem emerges in part because Hölderlin upholds a notion of radical temporality (i.e., time that is *not* understood by analogy to space), and this makes impossible to “plot” the event within some spatial-like temporal “whole.” Consequently, divine memory is unable to represent itself to itself. Experiencing and remembering the divine event are temporally paradoxical to the core.

The last section, as I said, will question the very reality of the divine event, which follows naturally from our encounter with its paradoxicality. Although Hölderlin’s poetry repeatedly treats the event as something empirical or “kinetic,” this model does not always hold up. Sometimes the event seems to be completely figurative, like the “time” of discursive logic or the inner “disturbance” of Being. My intent in pointing this out will not be to “deconstruct” Hölderlinian time and undermine my own the argument, so much as to show once again that Hölderlin’s poetry is caught in the historical tension between religious and philosophical discourse. To resolve the temporal paradox of the event would be to lose sight of the poetry’s historical meaning.

God in Time and Space

In everyday life, we constantly convert time into space. Clocks, calendars, and timelines are all tools for representing—i.e., letting us “look at”—something that is invisible and, by most accounts, constantly flowing. While these time-to-space conversions work for us, none of us are convinced that they demonstrate the *equivalence* of time and space. (The

Einsteinian space-time equivalence is of a very different sort, and utterly non-intuitive.) In our intuitive experience, space is something that stays put, while time is forever running away. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says that time “has only one dimension: different times are not simultaneous, but successive” (162). Within this succession the only time that actually exists is the immediate “now,” which makes an infinitely large fraction of all possible time nonexistent. We can relate “now” to a concept or image of the past or future, but this connection is imaginative rather than real, since time-in-itself has no extended parts that can be “fit” together. Any time we think of time as anything more than an instant, we have already translated it into a spatial metaphor. “Die ‘Erzeugung’ der Zeit durch die verständige Einbildungskraft [ist] gleichbedeutend mit der entaktualisierenden Verräumlichung dessen, was an der Zeit das eigentlich Zeitliche ist.”⁴

Because this spatialized view of time is artificial, it has weaknesses that can be harnessed for religious representation. Since time is forever destroying one “now” in favor of the next, it can never become a whole. To create a whole, all the parts must come together and communicate at the *same* time. Since the essence of time is succession, it can never be gathered into one. If, therefore, we should choose to think of God as somehow more “like” time than space, we lose all hope of knowing him rationally, since he can never be “gathered up” and placed before us in a contemplable form. Time is a series of exclusions, in which one moment can never co-exist with the next, and what is excluded never forms part of a whole. This is a problem, since it is only in relation to wholes—which are necessarily spatial—that we can understand anything.

⁴ Krüger, “Über Kants Lehre von der Zeit,” p. 282.

But why should we want to think of God as more like time than space? The answer has, I believe, emerged in the preceding chapter. To think spatially is to represent, to “paint” the image of a thing in our mind, and this puts us in a position of visual mastery. Philosophy is the developed form of this mastery. But the divine is, among other things, that which exceeds all human mastery, and therefore cannot be adequately represented. The ancient prohibition against divine images can be seen in this spirit. When we do articulate the divine through representations, we run the risk of success. By this I mean that our representations can be out-manuevered by a philosophy, such as Fichtean or Hegelian idealism, which explains *all* representational activity without leaving room for transcendence. If, in contrast, we want to think of the divine as being more like time than space, there is no danger of visual mastery. Space allows itself to be colonized, but time puts us on the defensive. We need not look far into the past or the future before we see ourselves disappear into the very fabric of time. We can manipulate the experience of time to a considerable degree through cycles and rituals, but we know that these very cycles and rituals are subject to time, and will not last. Most importantly, we cannot subject it to our gaze. We cannot cut it up, lay it out, and say, “here it is, take a look.” For all these reasons, the rhetoric of time is a powerful resource for the poetic (non-)representation of the divine.

If God were somehow more like time than space, then our traditional representations of God would have to be utterly figurative. The Jehovah of the Old Testament behaves like one physical being among others, and is profoundly “spatial.” The Christian idea that God is the same “yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8) is nothing if not the constancy of space (or something like it) amidst the flow of time, and a

truly “temporal” theology would require us to abandon altogether the spatial ideal of divine sameness. This is, I shall argue in a minute, is just the direction Hölderlin is heading.

Before getting to Hölderlin, however, we need to consider the more orthodox approach to “temporalizing” the divine found in Hegel. On one level, it might seem that Hegel has entirely shifted God from the spatial to the temporal field. Spirit, after all, is a certain kind of intellectual movement (i.e., negation), and its “body” is history. But we need to remember that Hegelian history is a teleological unfolding. “God,” as we saw in the last chapter, is merely the “*region* [of consciousness] in which all the enigmas of the world are solved” (128-129; my emphasis), the unity-across-difference that makes history a meaningful process. The “region” we call God is, moreover, part of a *system*, a dialectical *pattern* explaining how and why human history evolves as it does. Theology must be understood as the *story* of this system, as the chronicle of God’s self-realization in the *form* of history.

In comparison to what we find in Hölderlin, Hegel’s historicism seems to be more about space than time. The problem emerges in the relation of history to logic. History, for Hegel, is syllogistic: a state of consciousness (A) “precedes” another state (B) that negates the first, which is in turn “followed” by the negation of the negation (C), and so forth. Once we start thinking about the past, history and logic become blurred, and it is dialectical *logic* that ultimately determines the truth of history. History, in other words, acquires *shape*. It moves from the realm of time over into the spatial realm of dialectics. *All* judgments, indeed, require the juxtaposition, superimposition, division, or identification of discreet representations, which are all spatial operations. History is no

exception. In historical judgments the temporality of history is the same as the “temporality” of logic. Hegel’s *Lectures* demonstrate, for example, how religions of divine immediacy (nature worship) precede religions that elevate the spiritual above the natural (Judaism, Greek religion), which are in turn followed by a religion that reconciles the spiritual to the natural via the human subject (Christianity), all in the same *logical* way that A “precedes” B, and C “follows” from A and B in a syllogism. There is an unbroken continuity in this process, which resembles the continuity of space rather than the contiguity of time.

This is not to say that time is optional or unreal for Hegel. Historical time is the *tracing-out of Spirit*, and as such is inescapable. There is no way to “skip” directly from A to B, or from a given idea to its negation. There is no divination that can sidestep the *duration* of the tracing-out. Hegel tells us that

impatience demands the impossible, to wit, the attainment of the end without the means. But the length of this path has to be endured, because, for one thing, each moment is necessary; and further, each moment has to be lingered over, because each is itself a complete individual shape, and one is only viewed in absolute perspective when its determinateness is regarded as a concrete whole... (17)

Thought travels the “length” of a temporal “path” as it patiently familiarizes itself with an endless series of “moments.” Time is thus the “time it takes” to perceive and reflect upon each of these “moments.” This does not change the fact, however, that time is still only the performance of a dialectical form, the geometric accretion around the “complete individual shapes” of our individual experiences. Time yields nothing beyond the “individual shape” of the moment and the dialectical shape of its connection to other moments in a consecutive series. The “moments” of the past are consequently reduced to the “already acquired *property* [i.e., a spatial thing] of universal spirit which constitutes

the *Substance* of the individual, and hence appears *externally* to him as his inorganic nature” (16; my emphasis). Spirit *drains* temporality out of present experience leaving behind dead “property,” which can then be piled high as the accumulated “riches” of human knowledge. Time immediately converts itself to space in Hegelian dialectic.

Hegel’s account of time is limited on another account. The “length of the path” traversed by thought explains time as a subjective human experience, but it does not address the possibility (which we can assume that Hegel rejects) of a *divine, non-human* temporality, i.e., the time of non-human agency. Hegel only ever talks about the tracing-out of Spirit’s progress, which is *my* (or our) *human* progress. Now if, through a magical symmetry, time could hold a similar significance outside the human world, then the divine could be tracing-out its own path. This sounds strange, but it is really just the timeless religious notion of spiritual pluralism, i.e., the ontological distinction between an agent God (or gods) and an agent soul. It is this pluralism that Descartes upholds philosophically when he distinguishes between God and the cogito, and which Spinoza rejects in making our thinking a mere “attribute” of divine substance. There are competing “cosmic imaginaries” at work between Descartes and Hegel, and Hölderlin, although he is pulled both ways, seems to clearly lean toward the pluralistic one. He takes the basically religious view that something can be *actively* going on in the world that eludes or contradicts the rational measures we bring to bear on it, or could *ever* bring to bear on it. There can be another historical power at work that is not Spirit (or even Nature), and which we, with the epistemological tools of Spirit, cannot adequately comprehend.⁵ This other living truth might appear as nothing more than an indefinable

⁵ Of course, this pluralism can also have an *anti*-religious valence, where the non-human truth is diabolical or absurd. We see a hint of this in poems like “Hälfte des Lebens” and “Hyperions Schicksalslied,” and

disturbance in our experience (like that of the phenomenological “event” of postmodern theology), or it could appear as something more.

Hegel would perhaps reject this idea as a “science-stopper,” and would probably argue that the inexplicable is only ever a temporary, imperfect misunderstanding. God, for instance, remained uncomprehended until Hegel explained him as the “absolute, eternal idea” of antecedent being-in-itself that manifests itself to itself as Spirit, i.e., as negation and reconciliation (see *Lectures*, pp. 415-416). Divine otherness, for Hegel, would simply be the appearance worn by negation until it is integrated with its opposite through reconciliation. At that point the opposition does not disappear, but it is seen in its proper light as part of a unified process of Spirit or Nature.

Now there is a moment of faith in all this. Hegel believes that dialectic will always work, and that difference will always prove tractable. Dialectical interpretation has worked so well—Hegel’s vast writings are the evidence—that it is safe to wager everything on it. Put in terms pertinent to our present argument, Hegel believes that there is only one meaningful temporality: the tracing-out of the dialectic, which is really a spatiality-experienced-over-time. But a philosophy subordinating time to space (like Hegel’s) necessarily suggests the possibility of a counter philosophy in which time would not merely be the “time it takes” to produce a form. On the contrary, form would be the expression of time. But what would this mean? How can we tell the difference between space-experienced-over-time and time-experienced-over-space?

Part of the answer comes in the prioritization of unity and difference. As we have pointed out, Kantian time is disjunctive, and a “temporal” truth rendered spatially would

more of it in the fiction of Tieck, Kleist, and Hoffmann. The idea of an anti-religious non-rational truth comes to fullness in the pessimistic metaphysics of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

look disjunctive or unformed. The “shapes” of each successive moment of time do not compact nicely into a larger, unified, dialectical shape. A “temporal” divine would have no clear teleological objective, such as Hegel’s “absolute knowing,” where the “one” and the “many” form a single sublime whole. Instead, it would produce *multiple* wholes, and “absolute knowing”—if the term were still allowed—would at most signify *an* absolute knowing. Each “shape” of knowledge along the way would be an independent culmination, and “God” would be the agent of eternal difference *between* these culminations. We could not “know” God through any kind of panoramic survey of History, Nature, or Reason, because God is a vertical incision into these “horizontal” representations. He is a wound in our understanding, which is precisely what the Hölderlinian *Zäsur*, discussed in the introduction, is all about. Our only hope for knowing God lies in the detection of “depth” *within* the vertical. This depth is crucial if religion is not to simply fall apart into difference. In Hölderlin, the surface is broken in order to reveal a mystery underneath, and not merely to uncover a depressing emptiness. Hölderlin is not Nietzsche, and his God is (among other things) a Christian God who cannot be separated from certain experiences of love and joy. But I am getting ahead of myself. Before we get into an analysis of the quality of divine depth, I want to look at some of the ways Hölderlin tries to heal the wound of time (putting aside the fact that divine love and joy can be concealed in the wound), and restore continuity across the caesura of historical experience.

History and Memory

We have concluded thus far that to understand time frequently means to substitute it with space, which obscures time's distinctive character as non-continuity. It would be too extreme to say that Hölderlin simply turns this on its head. Ultimately, he wants to clarify the nature of the divine in some way, and if God is in time, the poet must introduce *some* kind of spatial stability into temporality. Otherwise we would not understand him. (Of course, some of his latest poetry before falling into madness *was* incomprehensible.) Poetry is a play of words, and words—if they are to have any meaning at all—must evoke representations, even if only to subvert or confuse them. Much of Hölderlin's poetry, however, seems to hold out real hope that a sufficiently sophisticated representation *will* make spatial sense of time, and consequently of God's relation to the world through time. This hope is played out in his discussion of history and memory, to which we now turn.

Perhaps Hölderlin's most important break with Hegel's treatment of time occurs in his view of historical process. Rather than describing history as a teleological progression, Hölderlin talks about it as a succession of "particular wholes" (*besonderen Ganzen*):

Das untergehende Vaterland, Natur und Menschen insofern sie in einer besondern Wechselwirkung stehen, eine *besondere* idealgewordene Welt, und Verbindung der Dinge ausmachen, und sich insofern auflösen damit aus ihr und aus dem überbleibenden Geschlechte und den überbleibenden Kräften der Natur, die das andere reale Prinzip sind, eine neue Welt, eine neue aber auch besondere Wechselwirkung, sich bilde, so wie jener Untergang aus einer reinen aber besondern Welt hervorgieng. (MA 2: 72)

In these opening lines of this essay-fragment, Hölderlin describes the relation between historical moments as one of collapse and rebirth. One world achieves its “particular” (*besondere*) ideal completion and is displaced by a second world with a different ideal configuration. There is no conflict with Hegel here, but Hölderlin uses the suggestive phrase: “eine idealgewordene Welt,” almost as if its ideality were subordinate to “das andere reale Prinzip,” the naked, non-“spiritualized” force of man and nature (i.e., the “überbleibende Geschlechter und...Kräfte der Natur”) that is *always* present. If a world “becomes” ideal only when “Vaterland, Natur und Menschen...in einer *besondern* Wechselwirkung stehen,” then ideality would be only an *intermittent* feature of the world, and the “other, real principle” would be the more radical, permanent truth (or lack of truth) abiding even in times of historical rupture. These unstructured ruptures between ideal worlds could still be reconciled with Hegel, as long as we posit a transhistorical principle such as Spirit *guiding* the transition of worlds *through* the rupture. This way, there could be a spiritual accumulation or progress *spanning* the alternation of worlds. Without this guiding principle, historical rupture could reset the humanity’s spiritual counter back to zero with every epochal change. But does Hölderlin employ such a transhistorical principle in his *Geschichtsphilosophie*, or does he accept the non-cumulative model of history?

The answer seems to be a bit of both. On the one hand, he seems to reject historical teleology. Hölderlin’s description of historical transformation suggests the *appearance* of the absolute in history rather than the progress of history *under* the absolute.

Denn die Welt aller Welten, das Alles in Allen, welches immer *ist* und aus dessen Seyn alles angesehen werden muß, *stellt* sich nur in aller Zeit—oder im

Untergange oder im Moment, oder genetischer im Werden des Moments und Anfang von Zeit und Welt *dar...* (MA 2: 72)

In the turning points of history, a primal world (the *Welt aller Welten*) communicates with the particular, historical world(s). Past and future are connected only through this primal world, and not (as far as we can tell) through the direct relation of “negation.” To a degree, the *Welt aller Welten* corresponds to Hegel’s God, i.e., the “region” of consciousness where all contradictions are resolved, but Hegel’s God does not show itself (*sich darstellen*) in history as the *Welt aller Welten* does. Hegel’s God plays a regulative function as the ideal of unity; he does not appear on the stage of history, as we find in the moments of *Begeisterung* and divine encounter that recur in Hölderlin’s work and the work of a contemporary like Novalis.

It is easy to read Hölderlin as a dialectical historian, because he employs dialectical structures in his thought. Yet his conceptual building blocks are not cut to a true dialectical pattern. To see this, let us consider the following description of “Untergang,” which is roughly equivalent to the Hegelian process of negation:

Dieser Untergang oder Übergang des Vaterlands...fühlt sich in den Gliedern der bestehenden Welt so, daß in eben dem Momente und Grade, worinn sich das Bestehende auflöst, auch das Neueintretende, Jugendliche, Mögliche sich fühlt. Denn wie könnte die Auflösung empfunden werden ohne Vereinigung, wenn also das Bestehende in seiner Auflösung empfunden werden soll und empfunden wird, so muß dabei das Unerschöpfte und Unerschöpfliche, der Beziehungen und Kräfte, und jene die Auflösung mehr durch diese empfunden werden, als umgekehrt, denn aus Nichts wird nichts, und diß gradweise genommen heißt so viel, als daß dasjenige, welches zur Negation gehet, und insofern es aus der Wirklichkeit gehet, und noch nicht ein Mögliches ist, nicht wirken könne.

Aber das Mögliche, welches in die Wirklichkeit tritt, indem die Wirklichkeit sich auflöst, diß wirkt, und es bewirkt sowohl die Empfindung der Auflösung als die Erinnerung des Aufgelösten. (MA 2: 72-73)

Here we have a basic rhetoric of Hegelian dialectic: “Bestehende,” “Neueintretende,” “Negation,” “aus der Wirklichkeit gehet...in die Wirklichkeit tritt.” However, Hölderlin

compromises the dialectical logic of this passage by equating the “Neueintretende” with “das Unerschöpfte und Unerschöpfliche.” What negates the old is not the new, but the New (with a capital “n”). The old “particular” (*besondere*) reality is not replaced by a new “particular” reality that directly and logically negates the first, because the absolute (*Unerschöpfte-Unerschöpfliche*) makes an appearance *in between* these realities and *dissolves* what the second reality would have inverted or overcome to construct itself. The loose parts (i.e., “das andere reale Prinzip”) are reassembled to create the new, but the *ideality* of the new is a fresh creation emerging directly from the womb of eternity, *not* from a logical relation to the old. Once it falls apart, the old is nothing and can produce nothing (“aus Nichts wird nichts”) without some kind of addition, in this case a qualitative transformation of the old “particular” into the absolute *before* it becomes a new “particular.” The absolute is thus an additional coordinate lacking—or at least repositioned—in Hegel’s version of historical progress. It is an extra hinge: the “old” folds into the “New” (i.e., the *Unerschöpfte-Unerschöpfliche*), which folds again into the “new.” This ontology is important because it disrupts the possibility of an intellectual continuity (e.g. the logic of *Geist*) in history.

This non-dialectical view of history is clearly represented in Hölderlin’s epistolary novel *Hyperion*, especially in the last letter of the first volume. Here the difference between the ancient Athenian and the modern European is not related to any kind of linear progression of human spirit. Although Hölderlin is directly responding to Schiller’s *Aesthetische Briefe*, he does not really take up Schiller’s idea (later to be exploited by Hegel) that the “health” of ancient Greece is *inherently* responsible for

modern self-alienation. Schiller's Greece produces its own negation by an *immanent* logic:

Die Kultur selbst war es, welche der neuern Menschheit diese Wunde schlug. Sobald auf der einen Seite die erweiterte Erfahrung und das bestimmtere Denken eine schärfere Scheidung der Wissenschaften, auf der andern das verwickeltere Uhrwerk der Staaten eine strengere Absonderung der Stände und Geschäfte nothwendig machte, so zerriß auch der innere Bund der menschlichen Natur, und ein verderblicher Streit entzweyete ihre harmonischen Kräfte. (5:583)

Modern *Zerissenheit* is a direct result of the growth that resulted from the Greeks' harmonious nature. Schiller's remedy, of course, is to artificially re-establish the harmony of human drives through the pedagogy of art, which "trains" our passion and reason to work together like they used to in the "natural" condition of Greek culture. It is an unreligious solution to an unreligious problem.

Hölderlin identifies modern *Zerissenheit* in basically the same terms as Schiller.

In the "Scheltrede" at the end of the novel, we find Germans who are

Barbaren von alters her, *durch Fleiß und Wissenschaft*, und selbst durch Religion *barbarischer geworden*, tiefunfähig jedes göttlichen Gefühls...dumpf und harmonielos, wie die Scherben eines weggeworfenen Gefäßes.... Die Tugenden der Deutschen...sind ein glänzend Übel und nichts weiter; denn *Nothwerk* sind sie nur.... (MA 1: 754, 755; my emphasis)

The language is Schillerian, and the obvious thing to do here would be to employ Schiller's historical method to illuminate the relation between antiquity and modernity. Hölderlin, however, refrains from doing so. At the end of the *Scheltrede* we get Hölderlin's solution to modern barbarism, which has only a superficial resemblance to Schiller's call for aesthetic labor.

O Bellarmin! wo ein Volk das Schöne liebt, wo es den Genius in seinen Künstlern ehrt, da weht, wie Lebensluft, ein allgemeiner Geist, da öffnet sich der scheue Sinn, der Eigendünkel schmilzt, and fromm und groß sind alle Herzen und Helden gebiert die Begeisterung. (MA 1: 757)

Hölderlin's love of beauty is not the calculating use of aesthetic pleasure we find in Schiller. It is, rather, a kind of aesthetic worship, which calls forth a spiritual dispensation: "Helden gebiert die Begeisterung." In the middle of the novel, Hyperion tries to instill this *Begeisterung* in the Greek freedom fighters. He shows Schillerian optimism when, as "Erzieher [des] Volks" (MA 1: 693) he speaks to them "von besseren Tagen...und glänzend gehn die Augen ihnen auf, wenn sie des Bundes gedenken, der uns einigen soll, und das stolze Bild des werdenden Freistaats dämmert vor ihnen" (MA 1: 715). Believing in the moral power of the aesthetic *Bild* he has disseminated among the army, Hyperion triumphantly claims: "wir nehmen dem Zufall die Kraft, wir meistern das Schicksaal" (MA 1: 716). Now, *Schicksal* plays no role in Schiller's humanistic account of history, and with this metaphysical term Hölderlin changes everything. The aesthetically-inspired Greeks fall to raping and pillaging their own countrymen, and a penitent Hyperion confesses his hubris: "Das Schicksaal stößt mich ins Ungewisse hinaus und ich hab' es verdient" (MA 1: 7132). Hyperion's Schillerian fantasy bears bitter fruit because it neglected the supernatural. *Begeisterung* is not merely aesthetic vision, but a real gift, or *Schicksal*, from the gods. It cannot be forced, and the beautiful society depends *absolutely* on this gift. If history is to "advance," like it did in ancient Greece, it will require a direct intervention from the divine. When that intervention is terminated, the divine—the *Unerschöpfte-Unerschöpfliche*—will be lost as an active historical principle. This is an utterly non-dialectical, non-Schillerian, non-Hegelian view of historical process.

We can conclude that Hölderlin seems to reject historical continuity. Instead of a single unfolding world, we have multiple, successive worlds separated by the sea of the

absolute. But now we need to spend some time considering the ways that Hölderlin *resists* this discontinuity in his struggle to create a sense of historical meaning. This is a desperate, seemingly futile project, since the discontinuity of history has a metaphysical foundation. Nevertheless, Hölderlin seeks to connect past and present in two semi-related ways. On the one hand he tries to (1) to *expand the boundaries of the “particular whole” through typological historiography*. If the particular era to which we belong can be redefined broadly enough—i.e., if we can demonstrate post-Enlightenment Europe to be part of the same historical “particular” as ancient Greece—then the ontological problem of historical discontinuity can simply be ignored. If we have the Greeks in our local “slice” of history, who cares what lies outside? The best way to unify Greece, Palestine, and Germany turns out to be typological: the departure of the gods from Greece “is” the departure of Christ from his disciples, who in turn “are” the sorrowful yet hopeful poets of the modern day. On the other hand the poet (2) “*remembers*” the hidden presence of the divine in the *saecula* surrounding the divine moment. In other words, he challenges the ontology of disruption, at least as it occurs on the borders of our own historical moment. Let us look at these two activities—expanding the historical particular and “remembering” the divine’s hidden presence—in greater detail.

1. The need for historical continuity can be met—at least superficially—by shifting our tactical approach. Instead of trying to see all of history as united a priori by some ideal principle (which, we have just noted, seems to be lacking in Hölderlin), we can try to redefine the boundaries of the *present* era. History, we have seen, is made up of *besondere Ganzen*, which are unified in themselves, but not in their interrelation. All of

these particular wholes spring from the same *Welt aller Welten*, which means that none of them flows necessarily from any of the others, and we cannot hope to rationally analyze the large-scale operation of history. But we can talk about the unity *within* each of these historical wholes. Perhaps, then, if we can expand the historical boundaries of *this* whole (the one we are living in right now) far enough, the spiritual need for historical unity will be pacified. I will call this the “local unity approach” to history. This local approach does not satisfy the philosophical need for a universalizing a priori argument about the nature of history, but it does rob the latter of its urgency. If I can feel a local unity connecting me back, say, to ancient Greece, I’m content leaving the rest of human history shrouded in mystery. It is far enough removed from my immediate situation that I can just shrug it off. (In the end, however, this dark prehistory does play a role for Hölderlin, as we shall see.)

We can go pretty far with this local approach, because there is no instrumental way of measuring the boundaries of any “particular whole” in history. There is a lot of room for creative revision. It is logically defensible, then, to ask whether those historical units that *seem* to be wholes—e.g. classical Greece, medieval Christianity, modern Europe—might not, in fact, be *subdivisions* of a larger, complex whole: the West. All of Hölderlin’s historical reflections in his larger poems can be read as this kind of attempt. In “Brod and Wein,” he laments the sudden termination of Greece’s ancient glory, and then toys with the idea that the dissolution of Greece may have “stretched” in some way up until the death of Christ, thereby bringing two (sub-)wholes (Greece and early Christianity) into an overlapping relation:

Warum zeichnet, wie sonst [i.e., in Greek times], die Stirne des Mannes
ein Gott nicht,

Drückt den Stempel, wie sonst, nicht dem Getroffenen auf?
Oder er kam auch selbst und nahm des Menschen Gestalt an
Und vollendet' und schloß tröstend das himmlische Fest.
(StA 2,1: 93)

The poet toys with the idea that Christ (the most obvious candidate for the “er” in line three) is the end of the golden age of Greece. If this is so, the divine discontinuity between ancient Greece and Roman Palestine is bridged. The intervening centuries are not a void in religious history that has to be filled. The strange use of “oder” in the beginning third line, however, expresses the poet’s uncertainty about this extension of the ancient Greek world into the Christian world. The logic by which the poet bridges this void is not one that we can name. (What is the hypotactic function of “oder”? It’s impossible to say.) At the same time, this uncertainty allows the poet to put forward this bold idea. It is *not* certain where one “whole” ends and the next begins. Similarly, the vagueness surrounding the “er” in the third line both facilitates and raises doubt about the identity of god in question. We immediately think of Christ (i.e., the god who takes “des Menschen Gestalt” and completes [“vollendet”] the divine work), but it is not “provable” that this is a Christ reference. Perhaps the reference is (also) to Dionysus. Or perhaps “er” is merely the *type* of the dying God, which naturally encompasses both Christ and Dionysus. In later poetry, Hölderlin will feel more confident in asserting the fraternity of Christ and the gods of Greece (“zu sehr, / O Christus! häng ich an dir, / Wiewohl Herakles Bruder / Und kühn bekenne ich, du / Bist Bruder auch des Eviers...”). Typological thinking helps blur the boundaries of (sub-)wholes into larger wholes. But what is the ontological warrant for typological history?

Hölderlin’s revised, complex whole begins with the departure of the gods of Greece, which is typologically “stretched” to include the departure of Christ. This

eliminates the rupture between golden-age Greece and New Testament Palestine. The death of Christ, in turn, “stretches” to encompass the entire modern age, which is one long “night” of the gods. All of history since Greece is thus a single narrative of decline, and in the modern age we stand at the threshold of the *Unerschöpftes-Unerschöpfliches*, the sacred moment marking the death of one world and the birth of a new one.

One possible warrant for extending the bounds of the “particular whole” across time is the analogy with a similar extension across space, which we find the essay fragment frequently titled “Über Religion.” Here Hölderlin tells us that every individual constitutes a unique religious whole, and human sociality generates collective religious wholes in addition to the individual ones. When people have a “gemeinschaftliche Sphäre” in which they “menschlich, d.h. über die Notdurft erhaben wirken und leiden,” then they experience and share a “gemeinschaftliche Gottheit” (MA 2: 51-52). This common divinity is *also* a God along with the individual’s personal God. Hölderlin does not suggest that *my* divinity is absorbed or “sublated” into the common divinity, nor would we expect him to do so in light of the resistance to spiritual monism we encountered in the previous chapters. Rather, we have multiple religious existences, which can co-exist harmoniously. One of our religious existences can potentially emerge at an all-inclusive global level:

Und wenn es eine Sphäre gibt, in der alle zugleich leben, und mit der sie in mehr als notdürftiger Beziehung sich fühlen, dann, aber auch nur insoferne, haben sie alle eine gemeinschaftliche Gottheit. (MA 2: 52)

Of course, this “communal” (*gemeinschaftlich*) strategy for unifying individuals across space cannot work for individuals separated by time, since such individuals cannot

“wirken,” “leiden,” and “leben” together as a community. Is there some way to imaginatively socialize with the dead and the unborn? To be sure, Hölderlin does say:

Es muß aber hiebei nicht vergessen werden, daß der Mensch sich wohl auch in die Lage des andern versetzen, daß er die Sphäre des andern zu seiner eigenen Sphäre machen kann. (MA 2: 52)

However, identifying with the “Lage des andern” may only bring empathy, not unity. In the community-model, religious unity is not established through identity, i.e., through inhabiting someone else’s personal “sphere,” but on a higher plane by participating in a communal “sphere.” Furthermore, it becomes ever more difficult to put yourself “in die Lage des andern” as historical distance increases. How can a modern European put himself in the position of an ancient Greek? The parallel between the spatial unity of society and the temporal unity of history is tenuous at best.

We can conclude that Hölderlin’s attempt to “expand” the historical particular by viewing it as a subset of a larger, complex particular is very questionable. The analogy between community and history is not very helpful. We can find suggestive, typological ways of bridging the divide between historical particulars, but these never harden into certainty. It is hard to see how they could become certainties without directly challenging the ontology of discontinuity suggested by Hölderlin’s notion of *Zäsur*. Philosophically, the quest for historical unity seems to be a doomed enterprise.

In attempting to unify history by expanding the reach of the “particular whole,” Hölderlin walks a fine line between satisfying an intellectual need and compromising his philosophical integrity. Instead of finding fault with this, we should view it in context. The romantic period coincides with a Copernican upheaval in our view of history. Biblical criticism in the 18th century had severely compromised the authority of biblical

history, and geology was just beginning to discover the extreme antiquity of the earth. (James Hutton's pathbreaking paper on the age of the earth was presented to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1785.) Because of these revolutionary changes in the perceived factual basis of history, the traditional notion of history had to be modified. Hölderlin, like most people in his environment, felt on some level that history was supposed to be a progressive, teleological process. This view is part of the 18th-century "cosmic imaginary," to use Charles Taylor's phrase. With the expansion of the earth's age and the discrediting of biblical history, there was an increased tendency to view the progress of history as something gradual, rather than a dramatic story of Fall, Flood, and apocalyptic Redemption. In the early stages, however, this shift could feel confusing. Can events in history really have all that much meaning when history is so vast? Or is it history itself that carries meaning? If so much of history lies in "prehistorical" darkness, can we ever hope to know history's meaning? What value, if any, is there in restricting our focus to the local scene of history?

Human history is open to the same questions as history in general. When did human history start? Can we make general statements about it from the small slice of human history available to us? I think that the ambivalent feeling generated by such questions is present in Hölderlin's work, even if he does not speak about it in these terms. The typological hermeneutic he brings to bear on the "slice" of history containing ancient Greece and modern Germany is a thoughtful way of acknowledging the immensity of time, while also trying to expand the meaning of the present into that immensity. The "type" is a transhistorical figure partially inhabiting a "higher" time equidistant from all historical moments. All of history, despite its incomprehensible vastness, is gathered

together in the aura of higher time surrounding the “type.” So even if the poet’s typological hermeneutics fail to convincingly demonstrate the continued presence of the divine in history, they do suggest how history may have continual access to the “higher” time of the divine. In other words, “types” no longer function as “sign posts” marking the inner unity of some particular historical narrative, such as the biblical, in which the meaning of a type is another piece of history (e.g. Isaac on the altar and the Passover pointing to the life of Jesus); rather, types signify history’s capacity for ecstatic self-transcendence, and they do not point to anything in history, past or future. Or perhaps it would be better to reverse the agency: types mark history’s *receptivity* to the irruptions of transcendence. The only spiritual unity in history, then, is its perennial capacity to suffer the divine. God unifies history, then, only by being the active and ever-ready *mysterium* just beyond the human world.

The (a)historical truth of Hölderlinian typology, as I have just interpreted it, does not assist the poet in establishing the *immanent* continuity of the divine that he is looking for, but it nonetheless gets at something profound. The second method the poet uses to bridge the spiritual discontinuity of history takes an “inside” view of historical process rather than the bird’s-eye view of typological interpretation. In contrast to the inability of the typological approach to support its large narratives with “internal” historical evidence, memory’s internal evidence cannot manage to erect large narratives. The two approaches, typology and memory, could be mutually reinforcing, but the middle term linking the two together seems to be lacking. We can better understand this problem if we look more closely, now, at Hölderlin’s notion of memory.

2. Hölderlin is not merely concerned with the abstract form (i.e., part/whole, particular/universal) of historical unity; he is also concerned about the *feeling* of it. We just saw how working and feeling (“wirken und leiden”) can establish a unified historical community, but not a unified history *of* community. Any attempt to write such a history involves philosophical compromises. This historiographical dilemma only serves to highlight another question: how does the idea or feeling of unity-across-history arise in the first place? How do we come by it? How do we maintain it?

The answer is memory (*Erinnerung, Gedächtnis*). Memory is partly a retentive faculty, but it also has a constructive dimension, not unlike reason. Yet Hölderlin tends to hold the discourses of reason and memory apart. The hermeneutic “expansion” of the particular, which is a work of reason, presupposes some vision of the whole into which the particular is meant to fit. Memory operates without this presupposition of the whole, and will therefore never have the breadth of historical hermeneutics. It will, however, have a correspondingly greater grasp of the “feel” of unity, how it arises and how it is maintained. Memory is associated more with the experience of historical unity than with the understanding of it.

By making memory more “experience-near” than reason, Hölderlin loses a certain degree of representative control over it. By this I mean that memory is harder to treat as a single, integral thing. In the remainder of this section I will discuss two versions of memory, which seem to be rather disconnected. It may be that a single word, “memory,” is used to refer to entirely separate faculties. What unites them, in any case, is their end result: a sense of historical unity.

(i) The first form memory can take is a “holding on” to experience in defiance of time. Such “holding on” is both an act of retention and creation, as in these lines from “Der Rhein”:

Dann feiern das Brautfest Menschen und Götter...

Doch einigen eilt
Dies schnell vorüber, andere
Behalten es länger.
Die ewigen Götter sind
Voll Lebens allzeit; bis in den Tod
Kann aber ein Mensch auch
Im Gedächtnis doch das Beste behalten,
Und dann erlebt er das Höchste.
(StA 2,1: 147, 148)

Memory (*Gedächtnis*) establishes a spiritual unity to a person’s life by holding on to a divine experience (the “Brautfest Menschen und Götter”) all the way into that person’s death (“bis in den Tod”). It is obvious how this is an act of retention, but there is more than simple retention going on here. Only when a person preserves “das Beste” all the way to the end does he experience “das Höchste,” which is *more* than “das Beste.” In other words, the *direct* experience of the divine (“das Beste”) is not the *fullest* possible experience of the divine (“das Höchste”), and this fullest experience is remembered only at life’s end. Something has been accruing in memory, which surpasses the direct revelation.

This makes sense. When we talk about “remembering” something, we are often talking about much more than mere recollection. It is easy to recall that such-and-such a thing happened on such-and-such a date; it is another thing to re-live the experience in our mind and in our feelings. In order to keep hold of an experience (and not just a fact), we have to continually re-create it in our changing circumstances. To the extent that we

succeed in this re-creative act, the experience becomes more powerful and more meaningful, since it influences a greater portion of our life. Such re-creation of the past cannot halt time, however, and this leads to one of two results: either the experience will gradually alter its shape with each re-creation, until it can no longer be called the same experience; or we will find the world increasingly out of sync with our treasured experience, to the point that we fall out of the world (perhaps in a Hölderlinian madness or an Empedoclean death). In other words, either the experience dies in us or we die in the experience. Because memory tries to maintain the past in the present, it gradually loses integrity and fails.

It is worth pointing out that the argument just made does not have universal validity. In primitive “enchanted” societies, the same moment of “higher,” sacred time *could*, it seems, be reproduced in the rituals and festivals of religion.⁶ In a modern, “disenchanted” society, the divine is far more elusive and erratic, and cannot, strictly speaking, be reproduced at all. It can only be represented or “remembered,” which allows us to feel it and appreciate it more deeply (as Hölderlin says in his essay “Über Religion”), but at the cost of losing the original. We live almost exclusively in secular time, unlike primitive societies embedded in both sacred and secular time. The poet understands this on some level, and that is why he resorts to memory and reflection rather than ritual or festival as the path back to the divine. (He *likenes* certain experiences to festivals in his poetry, but this “likening” betrays the fact that we are not dealing with the thing itself. The direct return to sacred time via the sacred festival is not an option in a disenchanted society. The festivals we still do have—e.g. the Super Bowl—generally

⁶ The classic articulation of this theory is in Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959).

have little or no cosmic significance.) “Das Höchste” is better than “das Beste” not because it is more divine than “das Beste”—that would be a contradiction of terms—but because it uses “das Beste” in the best possible way given the circumstances: as a memory that is stretched, albeit creatively, across a lifetime in order to give that life a sense of spiritual unity.

(ii) The first kind of Hölderlinian memory, then, works against the spiritual emptying of heterogeneous time. It “holds on” to a divine moment in defiance of time, even though there is necessarily some loss and distortion in mnemonic (as opposed to ritual) re-creation. There is, however, another, very different path by which memory can bridge the spiritual gaps between the successive moments of time. This path works backwards from the divine moment, and begins with a feeling of dissolution (“die Empfindung der Auflösung”) signaling the disappearance of something that will have to be remembered. What disappears is not the divine, but the secular world—usually a historical *saeculum*—preceding the divine. The divine, the *Unerschöpfte-Unerschöpfliches*, emerges from this dissolution, as we have already seen. For the short-sighted, this moment of dissolution and emergence is a happy thing, but for those looking for meaning in history, it is perplexing. If the divine is here now, where was it before? What was the reason for its absence? If the divine can come and go as it pleases, are we powerless to effect our own salvation? We may have intimations of the divine in abundance, but if we have no sacramental access to God, what good are these intimations? The world of divine traces becomes a world of divine ruins.

The second form of memory in Hölderlin gesture toward a resolution of this problem. The old historical world comes undone (*sich auflöst*) in a certain way, and this

manner of self-undoing reveals its full nature. We cannot see the nature of this world while we are still inside of it, so the dissolution has a revelatory significance. One thing it reveals is the *necessity* of the old world's self-undoing ("die Auflösung als Notwendige"), which is not something we cannot see while we are still inside the old world. Only at the end can you know the beginning from the end, and understand the necessity of the whole. (To be sure, this view compromises the idea of human freedom, but many thinkers were making this sacrifice in the neo-Spinozist climate of the late Enlightenment.)

Now, this issue of necessity has meaning for our understanding of the divine, because the dissolution of the secular world is the negative image of the divine. The *Unerschöpftes-Unerschöpfliches* is what opens up beneath the secular as it comes undone, and we are suddenly faced with a choice: does the force of necessity come from within the secular, or does it come from without? Since the secular and the sacred share a common border, the "engine" of dissolution could come from either side. Thus the necessity of the secular world's self-undoing might also be seen as a hidden thread of divine logic extending back into the heart of the secular. Perhaps the divine *was* with us all along, and not just as a vestige, trace, or ruin. Perhaps it was an active force in history, and we just didn't recognize it as such.

This second kind of memory is backward-looking and reconstructive rather than forward looking and re-creative (as in the case of memory 1). It only perceives the divine in a past unity, and whether or not that unity extends into the future will depend on memory 1. But even if our powers of mnemonic retention and creation are prodigious, we

only carry the divine unity forward as individuals. In other words, memory 1 and memory 2 cannot be combined to assure the continuity of divine history on a large scale.

Let me now deal with a source of potential confusion about this reconstructive form of memory. Hölderlin employs a Hegelian-sounding rhetoric of self-negation to talk about it, which might lead us to think that the poet is articulating a less sophisticated form Hegel's philosophy of *Geist*.

Die Auflösung als Nothwendige, auf dem Gesichtspuncte der idealischen Erinnerung, wird als solche idealistisches Object des neuentwickelten Lebens, ein Rückblick auf den Weg, der zurückgelegt werden mußte, vom Anfang der Auflösung bis dahin, wo aus dem neuen Leben eine Erinnerung des Aufgelösten, und daraus, als Erklärung und Vereinigung der Lücke und des Contrasts, der zwischen dem neuen und dem Vergangenen stattfindet, die Erinnerung der Auflösung erfolgen kann. (MA 2: 73-73)

There is a “new life” (“neuentwickeltes Leben”) that takes as its “ideal object” the necessity of the dissolution of the “old” life, which, seen from the other side, is *also* the necessity of the construction of the “new” life. Memory, then, is now concerned with the relation of the past unity to the freshly born present. The character of the “new” life seems to consist of nothing but the awareness that the old had to dissolve. In other words, the “new” is simply a state of higher consciousness. This sounds a bit like Hegelian dialectic (although for Hegel it is really the third step—which is lacking in Hölderlin—that marks a new level of consciousness). However, there is a crucial difference here, since for Hölderlin there is no development of “content” to accompany this consciousness-raising. Indeed, the old world *dissolves* into the *Unerschöpfte-Unerschöpfliches*. Hölderlin's “negation” is *only* a negation; it is not a simultaneous affirmation of some new content. In Hegel, by contrast, there is the transmission and

reshaping of content in the negation: the freedom of none becomes the freedom of one, and eventually becomes the freedom of many.

Hölderlin's "loose" dialectic is represented more clearly at the end of the same paragraph, where he slightly alters what he said before:

...und nachdem diese Erinnerung des Aufgelösten...mit dem unendlichen Lebensgefühl durch die Erinnerung der Auflösung vereinigt und die Lücke zwischen denselben ausgefüllt ist, so gehet aus dieser Vereinigung und Vergleichung des Vergangenen Einzelnen, und des Unendlichen gegenwärtigen, der eigentlich neue Zustand, der nächste Schritt, der dem Vergangenen folgen soll, hervor. (MA 2: 74)

The structure of the idea is the same, but the language is different in one crucial respect. Instead of "neuentwickeltes Leben," Hölderlin speaks "*unendliches* Lebensgefühl" and "das *Unendliche* gegenwärtige." The "new" is clearly not just the negation of the old, in the way that capitalism is the negation of feudalism, or the Christian God is the negation of the Jewish God. The "new" is something beyond the chain of negation altogether: the eternal (*Unendliches*). Hölderlin in effect reaffirms that he is using the "double-hinged" model of history discussed earlier, whereby one particular reality (in this case, "das Vergangene Einzelne") folds into the absolute ("das Unendliche gegenwärtige"), out of which new particular reality ("der eigentlich neue Zustand, der nächste Schritt") then emerges. Crucially, the absolute mediates the connection between the "old" and "new" worlds in an extra-rational way that leaves no clear tracks for reflection to follow.

The epistemological barrier posed by the intervention of the absolute explains why the aspirations of memory 2 are very modest. In a dramatic contrast to Hegel's grandiose "absolute knowing," Hölderlin seeks a mere a thread of insight. The poet's final task ("letzte Aufgabe") is

eine Erinnerung zu haben, damit der Geist nie im einzelnen Momente, und wieder einem einzelnen Momente, sondern in einem Momente wie im andern fortdauernd, und in den verschiedenen Stimmungen sich gegenwärtig bleibe..." ("Wenn der Dichter einmal des Geistes mächtig..." MA 2: 87)

There is something desperate about this effort to remain spiritually conscious ("sich gegenwärtig bleiben") from one moment to the next. The poet lays down a "thread" (*Faden*) connecting the past to the present, and we can hardly expect a single fiber to hold its form or remain intact for long. The "thread" is not a "chain" of reasoning; it is not a rational, communicable insight. At most, it can be experienced *in passing* in language, as we shall consider more fully below.

The take-away here is that memory 2, or "reconstructive" memory, only illuminates the relation between a "particular" past and a divine present. The movement that occurs in this relation cannot be viewed as a teleological advance, because there is no development of "content." Memory does not, for example, help actualize "freedom" or advance any particular form of social, political, or moral life. The standpoint of memory is that of the *Unerschöpftes-Unerschöpfliches*, which is precisely formless. It *melts down* the old to create the new. Hegel, in contrast, has one "particular" building on the next (via negation) along an inexorable path toward a free and self-regulating bourgeois State. Hegel tucks the absolute away "inside" of history, making it the force *of* history rather than a force *in* history. Hegel has his own analogy: "just as the germ of the plant carries within itself the entire nature of the tree, even the taste and shape of its fruit, so the first traces of Spirit virtually contain all history" (21). Spirit is the alpha and omega, everywhere or nowhere, always or never.

The Hölderlinian absolute, however, is not identical with history, and this creates temporal heterogeneity. This is not the kind of heterogeneity that can be resolved when

viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, because eternity is not simply a perspective in Hölderlin; it is a site of foreign agency. This foreign, or divine, agency can intervene in history, and when it does it puts a vertical break in the horizontal plane of historical time.

Consequently, not all events can be plotted on the horizontal plane. Without taking the vertical into account, the divine will appear merely as a rupture in time. The two-dimensionality of time, and the consequences that flow from it are what I am referring to when I speak of temporal “heterogeneity.”

Before leaving moving on, let me note that the heterogeneity of time is only a conundrum for us moderns, who tend to think of the divine as something elusive and internal. In an “enchanted” world, the divine keeps a regular schedule of public appearances (via rituals, festivals, seasonal changes, etc.), and the fact that it retreats afterward into its native “higher” time does not trouble the inhabitants of the “enchanted” world. There is no danger of losing the divine, at least not until we begin to view society and nature in more mechanistic terms. At that point the priority of sacred and secular time shifts. The calendar used to be built around sacred events—the solstice, the harvest, the founding of the nation—but now it is built on scientific measurements—the rotation and revolution of the earth seen from no-man’s perspective out in space. In the modern age, sacred time has to answer to secular time. Hans Frei speaks, for example, of “the gradual change [in the modern West] to the sense of another temporal reality than the biblical. The self might or might not claim this new historical world as its appropriate home, but in any case the true narrative by which its reality is rendered is no longer identical with the Bible’s overarching story” (50).

Let me summarize what we have discussed thus far in this chapter. For Hölderlin, time is not uniform. Secular time is disrupted by divine moments that obscure the logical and substantive unities of history. This is what I have called Hölderlin's "ontology of temporal discontinuity" or "heterogeneous time." We can attempt to counter this discontinuity in two (or really three) ways.

First, we can finesse our understanding of history in such a way that the "particular" island of history on which we find ourselves is seen to include our ancestors-of-choice. For a German in the age of Winckelmann, these are the Greeks. This "local" unity takes on divine significance (and that's the goal here) if the unity is a spiritual one. In Hölderlin's case, the "merciful" withdrawal of the divine ("so sehr schonen die Himmlischen uns") that began in Greece is the same withdrawal we see in Christ's death and our in the modern "night" of the gods. Through a typological hermeneutic, the religious voids between Greece and modern Germany (and modern Germany *is* one of these voids) are seemingly overcome. The sacred types of the departing God, the hopeful disciple, and the prophet-poet (which we didn't discuss earlier) suggest a fraternal relation between past and present, which cannot, however, be substantiated by more concrete historical evidence.

Second, we can "remember" the divine where it would otherwise remain hidden. On a certain level, this is not much different than the first method, since both are trying to create a larger story out of one or more smaller stories. But the faculties involved in memory are different from the faculties involved in re-interpreting history. Historical hermeneutics draws on the analytical and imaginative faculties, while memory is more of a "felt" process, and that in two ways. On the one hand, memory (1) can be a willful

“holding on” to the divine despite the spiritual entropy of time. The “felt” component of this kind of memory is precisely this willfulness, which is the power of the moral faculty. Unlike the renewal of the divine through ritual, “holding on” to the divine is an intangible mnemonic activity. Because it is intangible, distortion and loss occur, and it is only the strongest who manage to hold on to some portion of the divine “bis in den Tod.” On the other hand, memory (2) can be a backward-facing excavation of the divine “thread” into the past. Instead of charging ahead with our hand clasped tightly around the divine, we follow its roots down to their hidden sources within the preceding *saeculum*. We “remember” how the old world had to dissolve into the New, and perceive this as a hidden operation of the divine. This is a “felt” process to the extent that it is an aesthetic experience; the divine pattern or “thread” extending into the past emerges through a power of its own, just like beauty emerges by itself (or, on a Kantian account, by an involuntary resonance of the mental faculties before certain objects). Reflection follows hard on the heels of this revelation, but it does not bring the revelation about.

All these methods of bridging the spiritual discontinuity of history have limited value. Both forms of memory (i and ii) only uncover the divine in the *saecula* immediately surrounding us. *None* of these methods (1, 2i, or 2ii) can give us knowledge a priori of the divine unity of *all* history.

What are we to make of this? Why does Hölderlin expend so much effort on the “unified theory” of divine history, when he has none of the right tools? The nature of the divine as transcendence guarantees that he will *never* have the right tools. (Keep in mind that the authority of the Bible was no longer intact.) On some level he knows that the

gods will never grant him the beatic vision—and certainly not the beatic articulation—of the unity that he seeks.

Ich sei genaht, die Himmlischen zu schauen,
Sie selbst, sie werfen mich tief unter die Lebenden,
Den falschen Priester, ins Dunkel, daß ich
Das warnende Lied den Gelehrigen singe.
("Wie wenn am Feiertage..." StA 2,1: 120)

So why does the poet write at all? What is the motivation? Is he moved by a repressed fear, a silent sense that we may live in an atheistic universe? Is poetry a way of indirectly working this out, facing and not facing it at the same time? Some people understand Hölderlin this way, but I want to propose a different motivation.

Earlier I said that memory is a "felt" process, because it takes the form of moral resolve (memory 1) or aesthetic discovery (memory 2). So even if Hölderlin's theory and/or poetic representation of memory does not "figure out" anything in final terms, it does involve us directly in the "feel" of the divine. Poetry can be the *experience* of divine engagement, and in this sense it is not unlike devotion, prayer, and meditation. The ancient Greek *theoria* contains something of this emphasis on the subjective experience of truth, independent of the conceptual knowledge that emerges from this experience. The labor of poetic memory is an essential one, not for any specific goal it accomplishes, but for the working intimacy it establishes with the sublime.

The Moment of Poetic Truth

I want to conclude this chapter on religious temporality by looking at a different, more troubling question. Throughout this study I have spoken of divine "events" and

“moments” as if such things really exist. They may be subtle and easily lost, but they are ultimately real and discrete phenomena. The discussion of memory in the previous section assumes that at some point the divine is “there,” and at some other point it is not. This being the case, it is fair to ask: how long is a divine moment? Where does it start and stop?

These are difficult questions. Sometimes the divine moment lasts for years, as in the Greek golden age, or the life of Christ. Sometimes it is the culmination of a “tausendjähriges Wetter,” as in the poem “Friedensfeier.” Sometimes, however, the divine moment is something ecstatic and brief, requiring us to “hold on” to it. These brief moments can in turn be subdivided into a few kinds. There is the “lightning strike” we read of in “Patmos”:

Drum sandt er ihnen
Den Geist, und freilich bebte
Das Haus und die Wetter Gottes rollten
Ferndonnernd über
Die ahnenden Häupter...

...und nicht geweissagt war es, sondern
Die Locken ergriff es, gegenwärtig,
Wenn ihnen plötzlich
Ferneilend zurück blickte
Der Gott...
(StA 2,1: 168, 169)

There is also a kind of “blessed mood” when heaven and earth seem to align just right:

Und herrlich ists, aus heiligem Schläfe dann
Erstehen und, aus Waldes Kühle
Erwachend, abends nun
Dem milderen Licht entgegenzugehen...
Auch ruht und zu der Schülerin jetzt,
Der Bildner, Gutes mehr
Denn Böses findend,
Zur heutigen Erde der Tag sich neiget.—

Dann feiern das Brautfest Menschen und Götter,
Es feiern die Lebenden all,
Und ausgeglichen
Ist eine Weile das Schicksal.
("Der Rhein," StA 2,1: 147)

There are also moments that seem to bleed across the temporal spectrum of past, present, and future. Not only the chronological placement, but also the duration of this moment can be profoundly unclear. It may be experienced as something immediate, but when we look at this immediacy more closely, its temporal boundaries suddenly stretch.

Let us look, for instance, at part of the second and third stanzas of "Friedensfeier," where the poet reflects on his encounter with the ambiguous divine figure of the "Fürst des Fests." At the end of the second stanza we read:

Und dämmernden Auges denk ich schon,
Vom ernsten Tagwerk lächelnd,
Ihn selbst zu sehn, den Fürsten des Fests...
...Nichts vor dir,
Nur Eines weiß ich, Sterbliches bist du nicht.
Ein Weiser mag mir manches erhellen; wo aber
Ein Gott noch auch erscheint,
Das ist doch andere Klarheit.
(MA 1: 362)

In these lines, the divine moment takes the form of a god's appearance ("denk ich...Ihn selbst zu sehn," "Ein Gott...erscheint"). But this simple moment of divine presence is immediately complicated in the third stanza:

Von heute aber nicht, nicht unverkündet ist er;
[...]
Das ist, sie hören das Werk,
Längst vorbereitend, von Morgen nach Abend, jetzt erst,
Des Donnerers Echo, das tausendjährige Wetter,
Zu schlafen, übertönt von Friedenslauten, hinunter.
(MA 1: 362)

The statement “Von heute aber nicht, nicht unverkündet ist er,” alters the nature of the previous *Erscheinung*, which no longer seems to be a sudden appearance of the divine as much as a sudden *awareness* of the divine’s gradual emergence out of the past (“das Werk, / Längst vorbereitend”). Drawing on the types of divine memory presented in the previous section, we can say that the poem moves from a memory 1 scenario (where memory “holds on” to divine presence) in the second stanza to a memory 2 scenario (where memory detects the divine emerging into the present from the dissolution of the past) in stanza three. The poem complicates both scenarios, however, by placing them in immediate proximity. The *Fürst des Fests* appears in his divine immediacy, and only afterward does the poet “hear” the divine “Werk, / Längst vorbereitend” rising out of history. The problem here is that the *Fürst* and the *Werk* are not the same thing. The latter seems to prepare for the former, but this connection remains conjectural; the *Fürst* never acknowledges the *Werk* as his own. The poem tentatively places the two experiences together, but they remain separated by different religious phenomenologies (*erscheinen* and *hören*). This is complicated all the more by the fact that the fifth stanza describes the divine in yet a third way: a “touch” that precedes divine awareness, and gradually emerges in consciousness as “Wahn,” “Schicksal,” and finally “Dank,” but *not* as “Erscheinung.”

The flexibility of the divine moment can irritate the rational observer, especially when a single poem can present incompatible versions of it. But this flexibility may point to another sort of truth. *Every* way of isolating the human-divine relation in time—the recurrence of types, the mnemonic “holding on” to a passing inspiration, the birth of historical worlds out of the womb of the absolute, the “visitation” of the gods during

golden ages—may be figurative rather than real. This seems the most logical conclusion when we are faced with variety of religious temporalities that cannot be reconciled at the surface level. If all divine “moments” or “events” are figurative, the divine ceases to be something empirical altogether.

At this point we come to what may be the insoluble aporia in Hölderlin’s poetic thought. The diverse temporal profiles of the event being irreconcilable, it may seem best, as I just suggested, to no longer think about the event as something real. The language of temporality seems to be adapting itself, like a metaphor, to some other reality, rather than serving as a frame for reality. More reliable and consistent than the temporal structure of the event is the divine *quality* of the event, which Otto calls *energisch* and I have called “kinetic.” The problem is that the energetic or kinetic “feel” of the divine resists an immanent explanation, and so a revelatory event is *required* to introduce it from outside the normal course of life. But if, as I am now suggesting, the very notion of the revelatory event is figurative, then it cannot serve as the ontological grounding for the kinetic revelation. We are stuck in a paradox.

The best way to make sense of this, I believe, is to go back to the idea I put forward in the introduction, namely that a poem needs to be read as a site of historical tensions. The paradox of the divine moment can make sense if we think of it in terms of incompatible religious and philosophical accounts of the divine trying—and failing—to reconcile themselves. To unify them would be to disfigure them entirely. Let me explain.

Religious experience cannot be accounted for by an analysis of consciousness, but rather requires an addition that comes through a historical event. We see this in Saint Teresa’s account of the divine:

If you...ask how it is possible that the soul can see and understand that she has been in God, since during the union she has neither sight nor understanding, I reply that she does not see it then, but that she sees it clearly later, after she has returned to herself, not by any vision, but *by a certitude which abides with her and which God alone can give her.*⁷

The abiding certainty of God can't be gotten behind, since its means of transmission are completely mysterious. At first we aren't even sure this transmission has occurred. (There is a strong parallel here to Hölderlin's idea that the gods come "unempfunden" and that "keiner weiß es, wenn?") What *is* certain is that this knowledge comes to us at some particular moment, "during the union" when the soul "has been in God." Religious knowledge comes through an *event* that cannot be penetrated by the gaze of *reflection*.

Philosophical experience is exactly the opposite. The "events" that philosophy—in particular idealism—investigates are of a transcendental sort. They do not actually occur in real time. There is no specifiable moment in the life of an individual when (to take an example from Fichte) the self-positing self first encounters a "check" to its consciousness and becomes aware of itself, or when it first realizes that the notion of division can be reconciled in the notion of unity. These "events" in the development of consciousness are really *analytical moments* that "succeed" each other only in the temporality of discursive or speculative logic. Philosophical knowledge thus comes through reflection and not through any kind of historical event.

Now, the aporia between religion and philosophy in Hölderlin's work occurs because in the final analysis the poet never adequately distinguishes between the religious event and the rational event. Hölderlin does not unambiguously reject the stance taken by Hegel, for whom the whole of history is a physical outworking of the speculative logic of

⁷ Quoted in William James, p. 446. My emphasis.

Geist. On this view, all events carrying spiritual meaning—even an event like the resurrection of Jesus (taken mythically)—are speculative events. This is the point I made earlier in this chapter, where I argued that Hegel has no radical concept of time and sees it as a spatial “tracing-out” of the shape of *Geist*. At that point I argued that Hölderlin differed from Hegel in his more radical view of time as medium through which absolute difference can enter history and consciousness. I still stand by that statement, but I would now add that Hölderlin does not make a committed and consistent use of this radical view of time, even though it is an essential prerequisite for the religious event. Instead, Hölderlin tries to find a connective or speculative logic between different moments in divine history and between these moments and our sacred inner experience. The danger, of course, is that a speculative connection between all these things would threaten the autonomy of the divine, since the divine could be seen as interchangeable with this speculative logic. This is exactly the kind of danger that the Nominalists saw in Scholastic realism, which seemed to bind God to the rational order of the world as we experience it. It is a short step from binding God to reason to replacing God by reason.

The key point is this: Hölderlin makes the temporal profile of the divine event very fluid in order to tease out the divine form from multiple angles, but in doing so he tacitly suggests that the divine is a rationally masterable *form* rather than a non-rational *content* coming to us through a revelatory event. Insofar as the divine is such a form, it loses its divine autonomy. In handling the divine form from many angles rather than simply witnessing to a divine content, Hölderlin is thinking like Hegel, who “was not offering empirical descriptions” of religious history in his *Lectures on Religion*, “but rather *imaginative* constructions intended to evoke disclosures of the ‘truth’ of the world

in which human beings dwell.”⁸ This-worldly truths are the object of speculative reason.

When he blurs the empirical profile of the divine event, Hölderlin looks like a philosopher trying to “evoke disclosures of the ‘truth’ of the world in which human beings dwell” rather than testifying of something extramundane.

Both religion and philosophy lose in this process. Religion loses because the divine is mistaken for something worldly, and philosophy loses because it is burdened with a divine content (*das Energische*, unmediated joy, etc.) for which it cannot account.

But in another sense Hölderlin gains his first real success here, since he provides us with a representation of the precise conflict between religion and philosophy. It is a gain, for the intellectual historian, to see that around the year 1800 an educated German poet trying to represent the moment of divine experience falls into a paradox that can be understood in terms of religious and philosophical temporalities of the event. My reading of Hölderlin does not wish to resolve this dual tendency. If we look at passages representing either version of the divine event—the kinetic revelation and the speculative movement—we will see that they each have their own attraction. We get the kinetic moment in the opening stanza of “Am Quell der Donau”:

Denn, wie wenn hoch von der herrlichgestimmten, der Orgel
Im heiligen Saal,
Reinquillend aus den unerschöpflichen Röhren,
Das Vorspiel, weckend, des Morgens beginnt
Und weitemher, von Halle zu Halle,
Der erfrischende nun, der melodische Strom rinnt,
Bis in den kalten Schatten das Haus
Von Begeisterungen erfüllt,
Nun aber erwacht ist, nun, aufsteigend ihr,
Der Sonne des Fests, antwortet
Der Chor der Gemeinde; so kam
Das Wort aus Osten zu uns,

⁸ Peter Hodgson’s introduction to the *Lectures*, p. 14. My emphasis.

Und an Parnassos Felsen und am Kithäron hör' ich
O Asia, das Echo von dir und es bricht sich
Am Kapitol und jählings herab von den Alpen

Kommt eine Fremdlingin sie
Zu uns, die Erweckerin,
Die menschenbildende Stimme.
Da faßt' ein Staunen die Seele
Der Getroffenen all und Nacht
War über den Augen der Besten.
Denn vieles vermag
Und die Flut und den Fels und Feuersgewalt auch
Bezinget mit Kunst der Mensch
Und achtet, der Hochgesinnte, das Schwert
Nicht, aber es steht
Vor Göttlichem der Starke niedergeschlagen...
("Am Quell der Donau," StA 2,1: 126-127)

A philosophical "event" seems to be subject of these lines from "Friedensfeier":

Viel hat von Morgen an,
Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander,
Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind wir aber Gesang.
Und das Zeitbild, das der große Geist entfaltet,
Ein Zeichen liegts vor uns, daß zwischen ihm und andern
Ein Bündnis zwischen ihm und andern Mächten ist.
Nicht er allein, die Unerzeugten, Ew'gen
Sind kennbar alle daran, gleichwie auch an den Pflanzen
Die Mutter Erde sich und Licht und Luft sich kennet.
Zuletzt ist aber doch, ihr heiligen Mächte, für euch
Das Liebeszeichen, das Zeugnis
Daß ihrs noch seiet, der Festtag,

Der Allversammelnde, wo Himmlische nicht
Im Wunder offenbar, noch ungesehn im Wetter,
Wo aber bei Gesang gastfreundlich untereinander
In Chören gegenwärtig, eine heilige Zahl
Die Seligen in jeglicher Weise
Beisammen sind...
("Friedensfeier," MA 1: 364)

Both passages are built around the image of a musical call-and-response, but the meaning of this image is very different in each case. The *Antwort* of the *Chor der Gemeinde* in "Am Quell der Donau" is a creaturely response to the overwhelming feeling of divine

fullness. Words and phrases like “weckend,” “erfrischend,” “bis in den kalten Schatten,” “von Begeisterungen erfüllt,” “erwacht,” “faßt’ ein Staunen die Seele,” and “Getroffenen,” capture the kinetic joy and elation of the religious event. Because it is religious, there is a historical moment (however vague) at its core: the advent of the “Erweckerin...aus Osten.” In the passage from “Friedensfeier,” by contrast, there is no concrete event. “Von Morgen an” we have been a “Gespräch,” and the background of this conversation is “das Zeitbild, das der große Geist entfaltet.” Time is an image (*Zeitbild*) to be deciphered by discourse; it is not the carrier of *das Energische*. Love, too, is a puzzle (*Liebeszeichen*) to be solved, not a visceral experience. Even the *Festtag* seems to be an extension of the *Zeitbild* rather than a kinetic event; the poet observes the discourse of the divine “choruses” from a distance, and is not personally overwhelmed by the music as in the previous poem. In summary, one poem gives us the divine as *das Energische* while the other one gives us a divine *Sprechen*, i.e., the back-and-forth of discursive or speculative knowledge.

If there is a “höherer Zusammenhang” uniting these two varieties of the divine moment that crisscross Hölderlin’s oeuvre, it is not present in the poems themselves. This is as it should be. Poetry, as Hölderlin says, is the attempt to represent a “höheren Zusammenhang... [der] sich genau betrachtet *weder recht denken ließe noch auch vor den Sinnen liege* (MA 2: 53; my emphasis). Ironically, the early essay fragment in which the notion of the “höherer Zusammenhang” appears is precisely a call for a new religion. This new religion is supposed to incorporate the old revelatory religion and unify it with reason.⁹ If the young Hölderlin is really serious about this, his project is paradoxical in an

⁹ In his edition based on the *Frankfurter Ausgabe*, Michael Knaupp sees this essay fragment as part of a project to write a series of philosophical letters in imitation of and in response to Schiller (MA 3: 388). In

extreme degree, because strictly speaking revelation requires transcendence, and transcendence is by definition (at least since the Nominalists) unbounded by reason. In the later poetry, the force of this paradox wins out over Hölderlin's idealism, but the meaning of Hölderlin's poetry *as a whole* cannot be labeled "religious" or "idealist." When scholars ask "'ob Hölderlin diesseits oder jenseits des Idealismus zu verorten sei,'"¹⁰ the best answer would be the question itself. I would only add that the destabilizing factor, the thing that makes it difficult to answer this question, is the crosscurrent of uniquely religious *Denkformen*—specifically the notions of transcendence and revelation—troubling the stream of Hölderlin's thought right to the bitter end.

these letters, Hölderlin writes to Niethammer on 24 February 1796, "will ich das Prinzip finden, das mir die Trennungen, in denen wir denken und existieren, erklärt, das aber auch vermögend ist, den Widerstreit verschwinden zu machen, den Widerstreit zwischen dem Subject und dem Object, zwischen unserem Selbst und der Welt, ja auch zwischen *Vernunft und Offenbarung*" (MA 2: 614; my emphasis).

¹⁰ See Christoph Jamme's introduction to "*Es bleibt aber eine Spur / Doch eines Wortes*": *Zur späten Hymnik und Tragödientheorie Friedrich Hölderlins* (München: Fink, 2004), p. 11.

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